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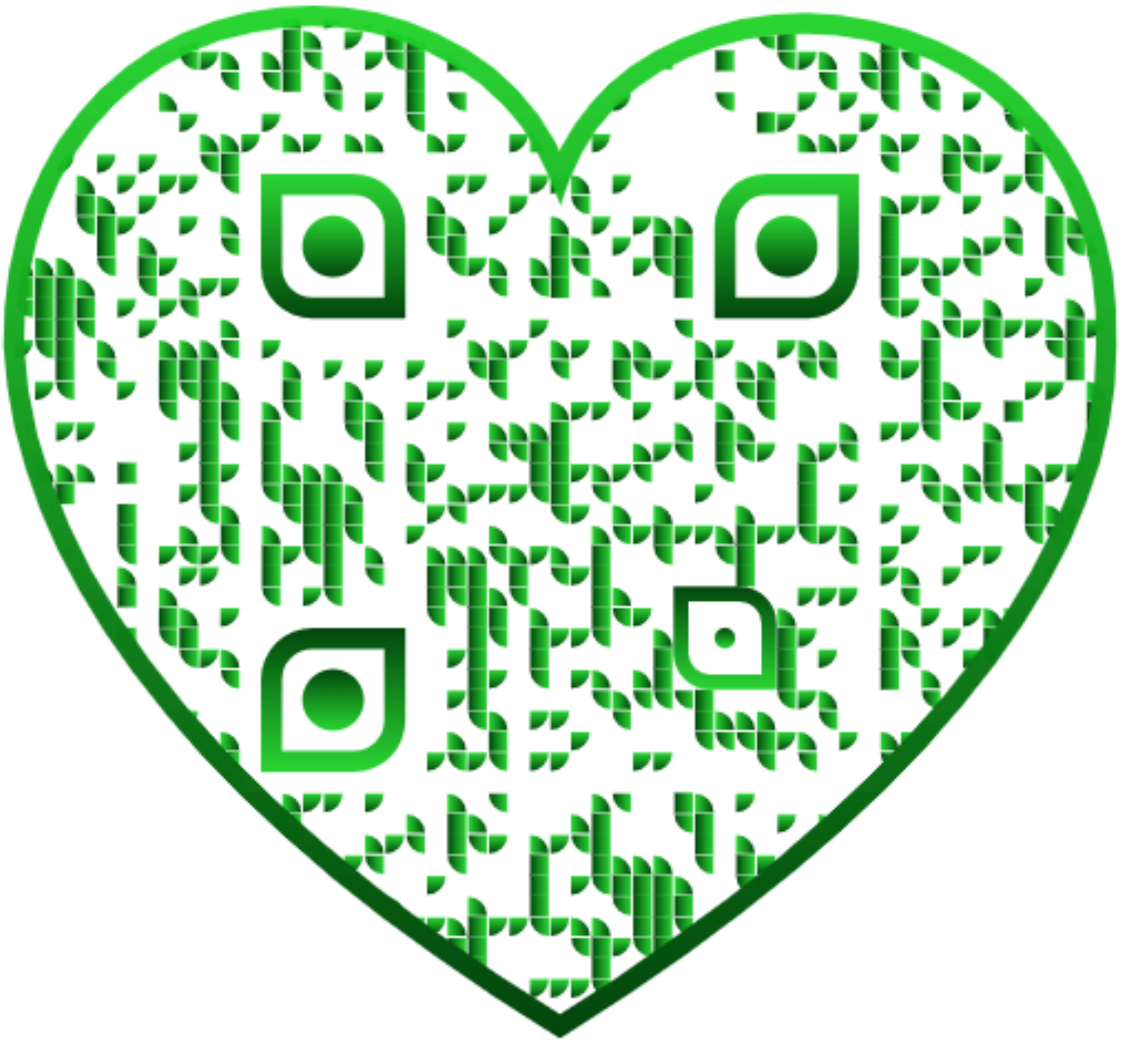

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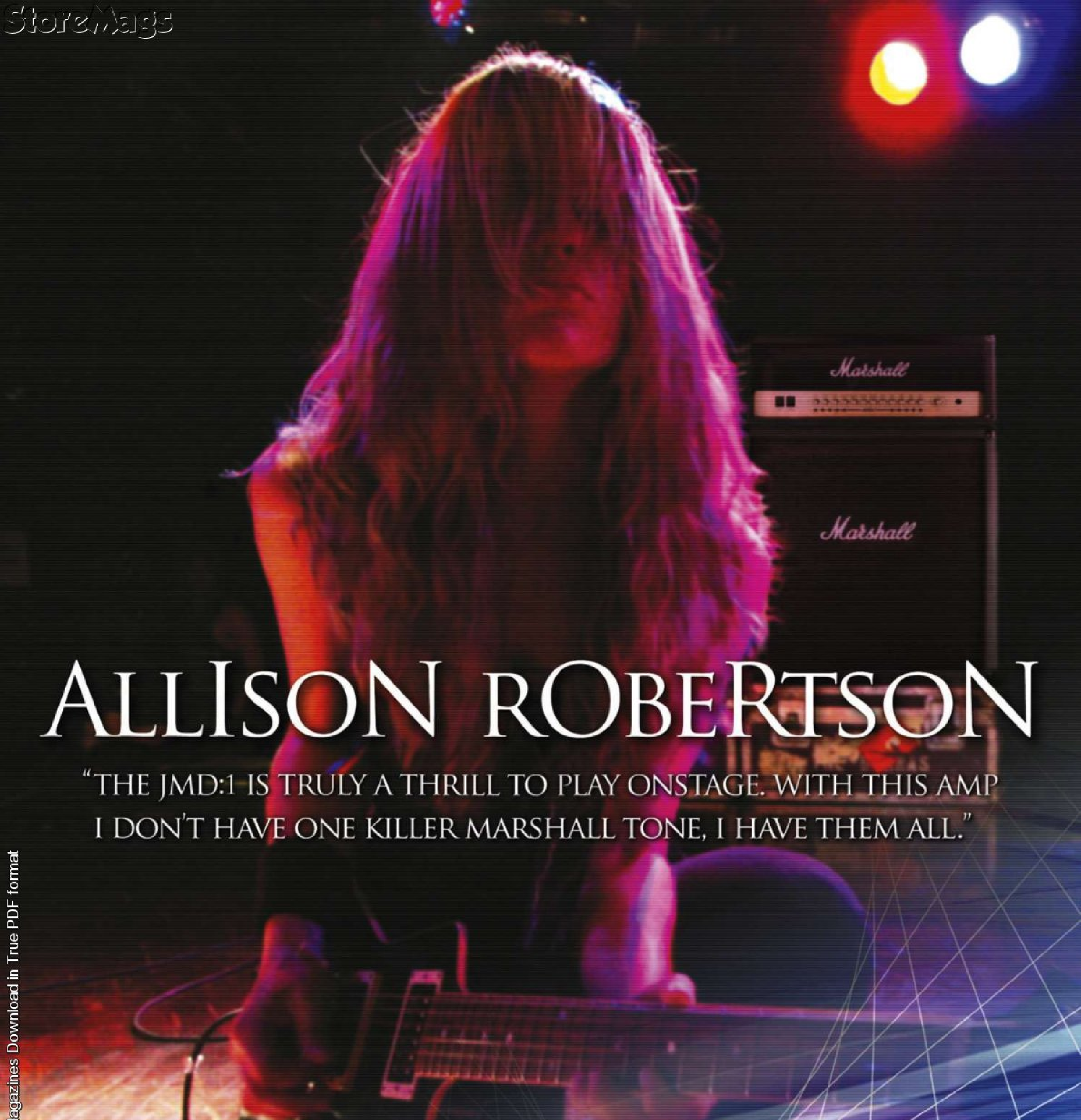

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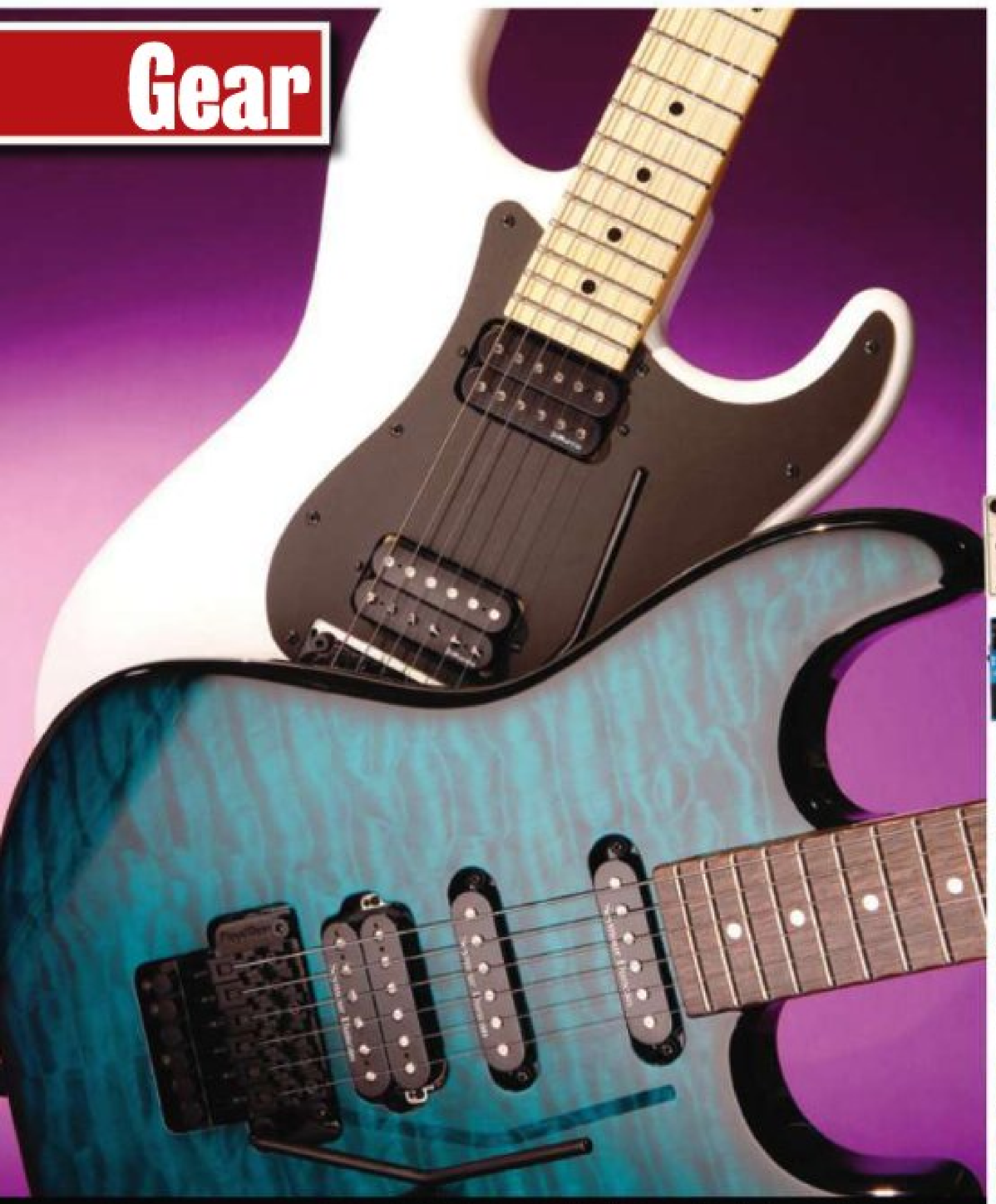

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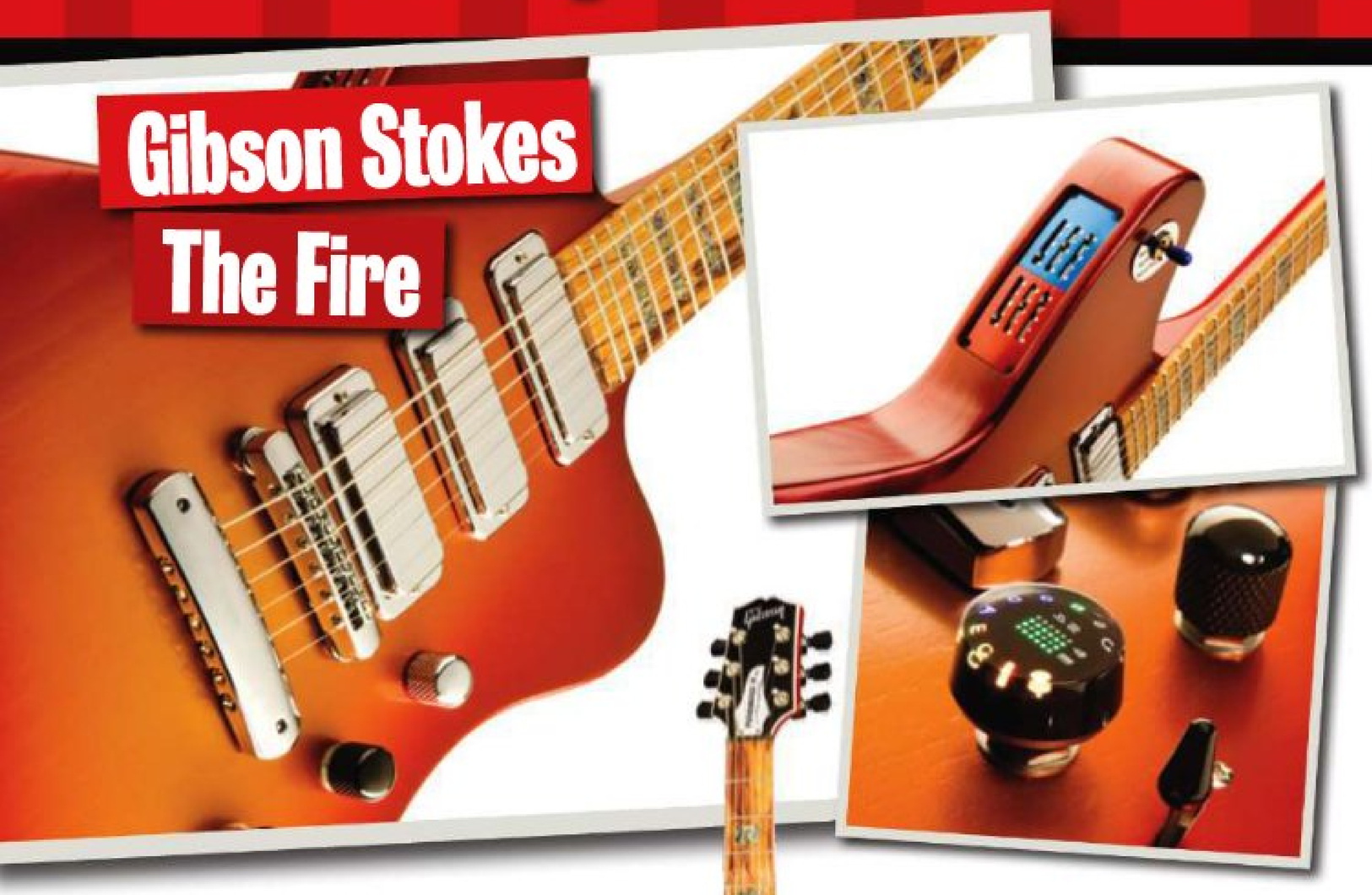
Woke Up This Mornin'

News



Gibson Stokes The Fire

Gibson is boldly stepping out with the futuristic Firebird X, a model intended to usher in a whole new generation of guitars. It's certainly turning heads – but among the Gibson faithful, it's also polarising opinion. There's the ultra-modern styling, the 'Redolution' finish, the asymmetrical neck with the pale Brazilian marblewood fingerboard... but the Firebird X is also literally crammed with state-of-the-art gizmos.

Firstly, there's a Pure-Analog digital signal processing engine with built-in Goldtone FX offering 'infinite voices' that are controlled via 'intuitive' controls (a Tog-Pot and effects faders) and wireless pedal controllers. It comes with Guitar Rig 4 and Gibson Ableton Live 8 software, and a G-Node interface that allows a digital feed from the guitar to your computer (and allows updates in the future). It has a 'Gear Shift' rotary knob with 11 positions that lets you switch between 55 presets, locking jack/XLR stereo outputs, and Gibson's Robot tuning technology. Power comes from a rechargeable lithium ion battery, while the FBX mini-humbucking pickups (Alnico II neck, Ceramic middle, Alnico V bridge) are controlled via a five-way selector. Gibson's CEO Henry Juszkiewicz promises 'sounds that have never been heard before.' There's only a limited run of 1800, but a second generation is being planned already. Not everyone's cup of tea, but a brave move, we're sure you'll agree. The price is £3299; for more, see www.gibson.com.

Flea Hits The Street

Built to the Red Hot Chilli Peppers' bassist's exacting specifications, the Fleabass range is about to welcome a brand new addition. The Streetbass is a budget version of the funkmeister's tourin' axe and features the exact same passive 'dual-core' Alnico humbuckers and string-through-body bridge as the higher-spec model. Other features include a 20-fret 34" scale solid maple neck carved to Flea's own preferred shape, and a rosewood fingerboard. The Streetbass range is finished in a vogueish range of colours (black and white, white and black, blue and white or silver and black) and, as such, is ideal for those requiring a stylish, good-value four-string. At only £249, it's a red hot bass at a red hot price. More details at www.fleabass.com.

Bare Knuckle Knock-Out

We've been awaiting Bare Knuckle's next move, and at long last they're back with their new Aftermath humbucking pickups, a high-gain range which promises to punch well and truly above its weight. If you're partial to a bit of heavy rock but want grunt without losing tightness, these will be just the ticket. They feature a symmetrically hand-wound twin-screw coil configuration and are powered by three custom-size ceramic magnets, making them ideal for quick-picking riffery with lightning-speed low end response, concentrated mids and truly well-defined high end. The price will be £199 for an open-top set or £230 with covers; see www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk.

Bass Bomber

Ampeg's 25W B-15 Portaflex combo was a revolutionary design when it was first unleashed back in 1960 owing to its canny 'flip-top' layout, combining the cooling ability of a separate head with the portability of a combo. Ampeg will resurrect it at NAMM 2011 and while they've only released a tantalising glimpse so far, it's likely to be well worth the wait. Unlike the B-15R, the Heritage B-15 promises to be a true replica of the original, lovingly hand-built and hand-wired by amp guru George Metropoulos with original inventor Jess Oliver consulting on the design. Check www.ampeg.com for the latest progress reports.

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Secret Shoppa

VISITING A GUITAR SHOP NEAR YOU!

MUSICROOM, LINCOLN

Dominated by its 11th century cathedral and by a hill that takes its toll on the unwary, Lincoln is a thriving progressive city with its own university and scores of venues offering live music from named bands to open mic night most evenings of the week. Musicroom has resided in the High Street as a music shop for over 20 years

LAYOUT: Guitar players shouldn't be put off by the gleaming rows of traditional and hi-tech pianos as you walk in from the street. Just waltz past pretending they're not there and head straight for the rear room, which is stuffed full of guitars – many with neat alternative finishes – and amps. The eager staff are trained in all aspects of guitar teaching, repairs and the art of making very drinkable tea and coffee

RANGE OF NEW GEAR: 'We like to think we have a selective quality range of guitars rather than blanketing the shop with things that might not sell,' says assistant manager Jon Grech. 'We hand-pick all our guitars, and we have a choice of over 150 electrics, basses and acoustics from Fender, Gibson, PRS, Taylor, Ibanez, Vintage, Martin, Yamaha, Epiphone and Vigier, plus a good selection of left-handers. Quality's also the word with our amps... Fender, Roland, Blackstar, Marshall, AER, Vox, Line 6 and Epiphone.'

SECONDHAND GEAR: 'It comes and goes. We only take in particularly clean items, so they're gone again pretty quick. At the moment we have a diverse collection, from heavy metal guitars to some high-end nylon-strung classicals.'

BEST BARGAIN IN THE SHOP: Several top models to choose from, notably an Ibanez Paul Gilbert 20th Anniversary once retailing at £2399 and now tagged at £1999 and a very nice Vigier CV Wood in purple, down from £2790 to £2319

HIGHLIGHT: Musicroom has a good reputation for helping behind the scenes with Battle Of The Bands competitions and encouraging younger players and Uni students with 10 months interest-free finance. There's also up to 12 months warranty on new guitars, plus discounts for teachers and members of the armed forces

CONCLUSION: Musicroom is a neat high street shop with full back-up service and in-store set ups. They also do tuition in guitar and bass, and piano... if you're brave enough.

VITAL STATISTICS

Layout	19/20
Staff knowledge	19/20
Staff helpfulness	19/20
Range of new gear	17/20
Range of secondhand gear	15/20
Parking	car parks close
TOTAL	89%

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In Brief

Sabbath To Reform?

40 years on from their seminal four-times-platinum metal gem *Paranoid*, rumours are rife for a Black Sabbath reunion in 2012. In an interview with *QMI*, Ozzy Osbourne mentioned that there was a possibility of the band sharing a stage again: 'I'm not saying I wouldn't do it,' said Osbourne, 'but not right now. I've got another year to finish my tour.' Ozzy also stated that Sabbath bassist Geezer Butler would 'have to stop moaning' before he would consider it. Here's hoping!

Spider Capo

Summerfield's new Spider Capo has a clever take on the regular capo clutch in that it grips each individual string, allowing players to strum both above and below the clamp. Not only will this neat little innovation free up a multitude of tuning and harmonic possibilities, it will also let players experiment with open strings. It could be an extremely helpful tool for the innovative guitarist, and they've released a mini version for banjos and ukuleles too. See www.spidercapo.com

Hum At Brum

After yet another success at their Bristol event, UK Guitar Shows are heading up to Birmingham on the 26-27 February next year. Zip along to the New Bingley Hall in the city centre to experience an exhibitor's list that already includes Marshall, Vigier, Diezel, JJ Guitars and Santa Cruz. Tickets are £8; see www.ukguitarshows.com.

The Manson stand and (below) JPJ and Jerry Donahue

Showmanship!

Exeter's Riverside Leisure Centre was home to Manson's Guitar Show for two days of guitar-based indulgence this month, with Fender, Marshall and Seymour Duncan all making a debut at the show. Taking top billing were Bernie Marsden with a fine blues set, a dazzling show from Jethro Tull's Martin Barre and Jan Akkerman, and Led Zep legend John Paul Jones, showcasing his new Manson bass in an impromptu jam with quick-picking virtuoso Jerry Donahue. Certainly an event to mark up in next year's diary.

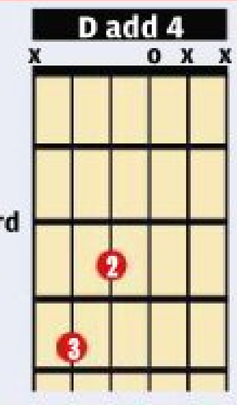
Meanwhile, Kensington Olympia buzzed to the sound of a thousand guitar solos for Live Nation. Highlights included Bare Knuckle's sweet-sounding pickup demo, Ashdown's sturdy bass rigs, PRS's opulent six-strings and, of course, *G&B*'s excellent stand. Steve Vai provided a masterclass for those with the wallet to attend, the Hamsters rocked some Hendrix covers and we ate lunch next to Jimmy Page. Job done.

Get A Grip!

Detroit's Grip Studios has come up with a genius alternative to the regular guitar stand. Their custom Guitar Grips are made of high-quality resin and arrive in fetching 'Hi Def Technicolor' (we rather like the gold) to literally lend you a hand. They'll mount neatly on any wall and come fitted with a rubber cushion that ensures your guitar's neck is safe from harm. Unique, distinctive and a whole lot of fun. £39.99; more info at www.guitargrip.com.

The Lost Chord

Only three notes, but how nicely they work together. It's the opening chord of Def Leppard's *Hysteria*, and it also plays a part at the start of Pink Floyd's *Goodbye Blue Sky*. It's the semitone clash between the open G and F# on the fourth string that gives this chord its evocative nature.



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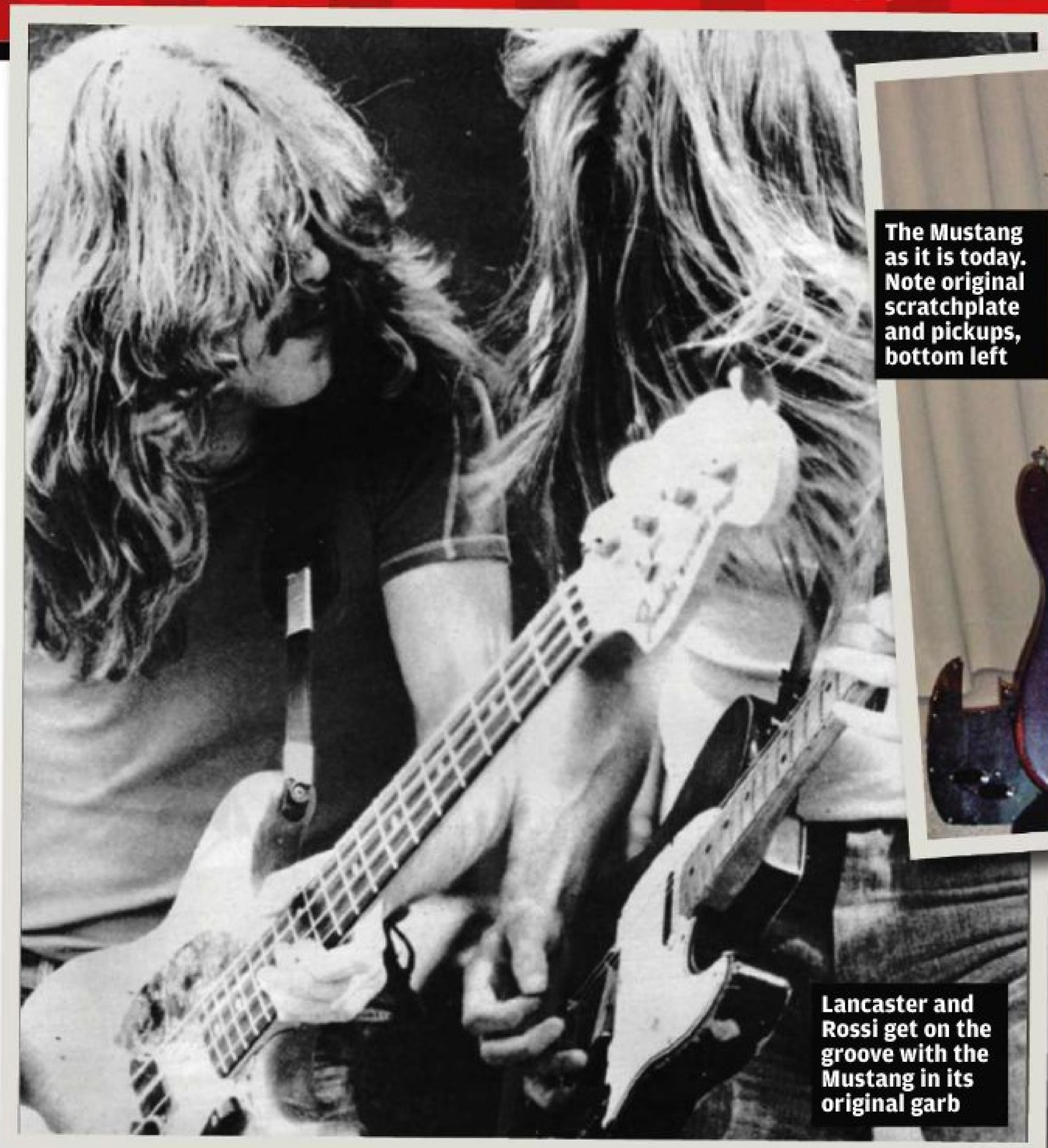
Woke Up This Mornin'...

Treasured Possessions



The Mustang as it is today. Note original scratchplate and pickups, bottom left

Lancaster and Rossi get on the groove with the Mustang in its original garb

Back when rock dinosaurs strolled the earth, a certain mighty boogie band was propelled by the fundamental punch of a weeny Fender student bass

Alan Lancaster

On Status Quo's Thumping

Fender Mustang Bass

The image of Rossi, Parfitt and Lancaster lined up on stage with heads banging furiously to that famous Quo shuffle is indelibly imprinted in the mind. Equally well-documented are those twin Teles, but what about Alan's Fender – surely the most famous Mustang Bass in rock?

'All my instruments hold vivid memories for me,' muses Alan, 'but in my heart of hearts, I think the Fender Mustang Bass is the most treasured of them all.'

He bought the bass just after Status Quo's first hit, *Pictures Of Matchstick Men*, a time when all the band were busily nabbing new equipment to reflect their newfound status as pop stars. The Quo's first serious tour was as one of the support acts for Gene Pitney. They kicked off in April 1968, and from then on Alan used it for virtually every stage and studio performance for a whole decade.

'I seem to remember purchasing the Mustang from Sound City around the Charing Cross area in London,' Lancaster recalls. 'Most serious Fender bass players go for the Mustang's bigger brothers, but I would have looked like an industrial crane on platform heels, and it certainly would have compromised my stage mobility.'

The Mustang's shorter scale felt right. 'The group was quite active on stage, so I needed a guitar that fitted me rather than having to fit myself to it. I played a lot of fast pumps and shuffles, so I raised the action to eliminate fret buzz and give more control. It made it tighter to play, but it was a workhorse that did as it was told.'

The bass originally had a white body and a tortoiseshell scratchplate, but changed appearance several times over the years. 'I replaced the scratchplate with a chrome one, and some years later the body was stripped to its bare wood finish. After a few years, stage sweat started to affect the wood, so it was sprayed with a mauve-coloured resin paint which has remained to this day.'

When Alan decided that the standard pickups had started to sound a bit dated he swapped to an active EMG, which gave it much more sustain; 'Some guitarists say they find EMGs a bit hard-sounding, but I think they work really well on bass guitars.' Alan had to replace the chrome guard with a white one to accommodate the EMG, but he still has it, and the original pickups too.

'Most serious Fender bass players go for the Mustang's bigger brothers, but I would have looked like an industrial crane on platform heels'

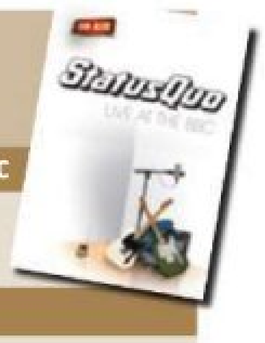
The Mustang finally fell out of favour in 1977 while recording the *Rockin' All Over The World* album, and Lancaster grew tired of the extra work it took to get the high notes he needed. 'To get the top D I had to get my little finger under the bridge and push it up high with support from my knee. When you're doing that fast it gets a bit tricky!' He was also taking a bit of stick from Rick Parfitt. 'He kept saying "That's not a proper bass, is it?" So I got hold of Travis Bean and a Kramer, and then started changing instruments like crazy.'

Lancaster left the band in 1983 and the Mustang gathered dust, but it's now enjoying a second lease of life. 'My son David plays it with his band The Presence. Have a look at their video for *All I Want Is Your Love* on Youtube and you'll see him playing it – it still has that certain sound.'

info

LATEST ALBUM: STATUS QUO LIVE AT THE BBC

An anthology of the Quo's live performances from BBC radio and TV on eight stompin' discs



MORE INFO:

www.statusquo.co.uk or www.fender.com

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Woke Up This Morning'...

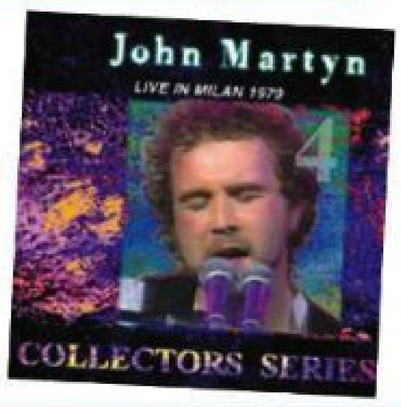
Soundtrack Of My Life

Sean Taylor

The independent-minded acoustic bluesman selects half a dozen albums from his favourite six-string mavericks

Without any record company backing or media hype Sean Taylor has carved a name for himself as an acoustic bluesman on the brink of something special. The beautifully-wrought fingerpicking on 2009's self-financed *Calcutta Grove* LP first alerted us to his potential, and the way he mesmerised the 3000 souls who attended his slot at the Glastonbury acoustic tent later that year confirmed it. He's put his heart and soul into his latest endeavour, *Walk With Me*, and it's an enchanting piece of work. The Waterboys' Trevor Hutchinson plays bass and produces, while guests include pedal steel whizz BJ Cole and Van Morrison's Hammond man Justin Carroll. It's a true testament to what can be achieved with just a Takamine, a borrowed Gibson Les Paul, brooding vocals and a bucketful of determination.

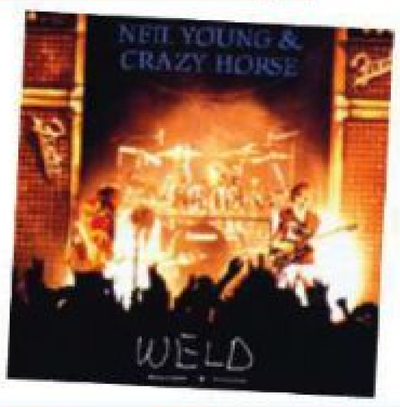
As a guitar album this covers just about every base...



John Martyn
Live In Milan

I'm a mad John Martyn fan and I've got everything he's ever done, including loads of bootlegs. This is a lesser-known album, but I love it. I always gravitate towards very live, rough-sounding guitarists rather than the clinical kind. From gentle acoustic songs to thunderous stuff with Echoplex and distortion... if you want a variety of sounds, I really don't think you can get near him.

Absolutely uncompromising full-on rock frenzy...



Neil Young & Crazy Horse
Weld

This is another live album that just knocks me over. There's a massive version of *Cortez The Killer* where he gets all these amazing controlled feedback sounds. It's full-on rock'n'roll. I find a lot of heavy rock loses me, but with Neil Young just when you think he's spiralling out of control he brings it back with the most beautiful melodic playing. I want that Les Paul of his, too.

A brilliant guitarist and a hugely underrated songwriter...

JJ Cale
Really

JJ's guitar playing is flawless. He's one of my all-time heroes... I don't think *[sometime collaborator]* Eric Clapton could ever get near it. This came out in 1972 and it was made at Muscle Shoals where they did all the Stax records. It's full of stunning, really laid back playing and it all sits together perfectly. The quality of the production was a real inspiration to me as well. He's just very special.

Unbelievably thunderous, instinctive slide guitar...

Rainer
Worried Spirits

Rainer Ptacek sadly died in 1996, and to me he's the most underrated musician I've ever come across. He was a National steel and dobro player. There's a track called *Tasted Better Going Down* which has a riff that just grabs you by the scruff of the neck – it's like a train going forwards and he's absolutely hauling out his soul. No one seems to have heard of him, but this is exhilarating.

One of the best guitar players I've ever seen – phenomenal...

Preston Reed
Metal

I saw Preston Reed play a few years ago and it was one of the best gigs I've ever been to. He's an absolute master – technically incredible but really melodic too. He does tapping and uses the body of the guitar for percussion; there's a real range of styles, and it's all just dangerously good. He says there's no overdubs on any of his albums, and until you see him live you just won't believe it.

African and US music blended to make something special...

Ali Farka Toure & Ry Cooder
Talking Timbuktu

I love African artists like Tinariwen and Amadou & Mariam, but this unusual mix really hooked me. African players tend to play quite trebly notes and they always seem to find very unusual melody lines. Here Ry Cooder complements that sound with a deep bottom end. When he comes in on *Gomni*, it just couldn't be anyone else. It brings home the similarities to the old blues stuff.

Play This Track From My Album...

Sean Taylor
Walk With Me

The last track *Fair Thee Well* is in DADGAD, which is the tuning I always come back to. This time I put a capo on the 7th fret and found a bluesy riff around the second fret up from there. There's so much you can do with DADGAD from dirty blues to romantic Celtic ballads – the range is huge.

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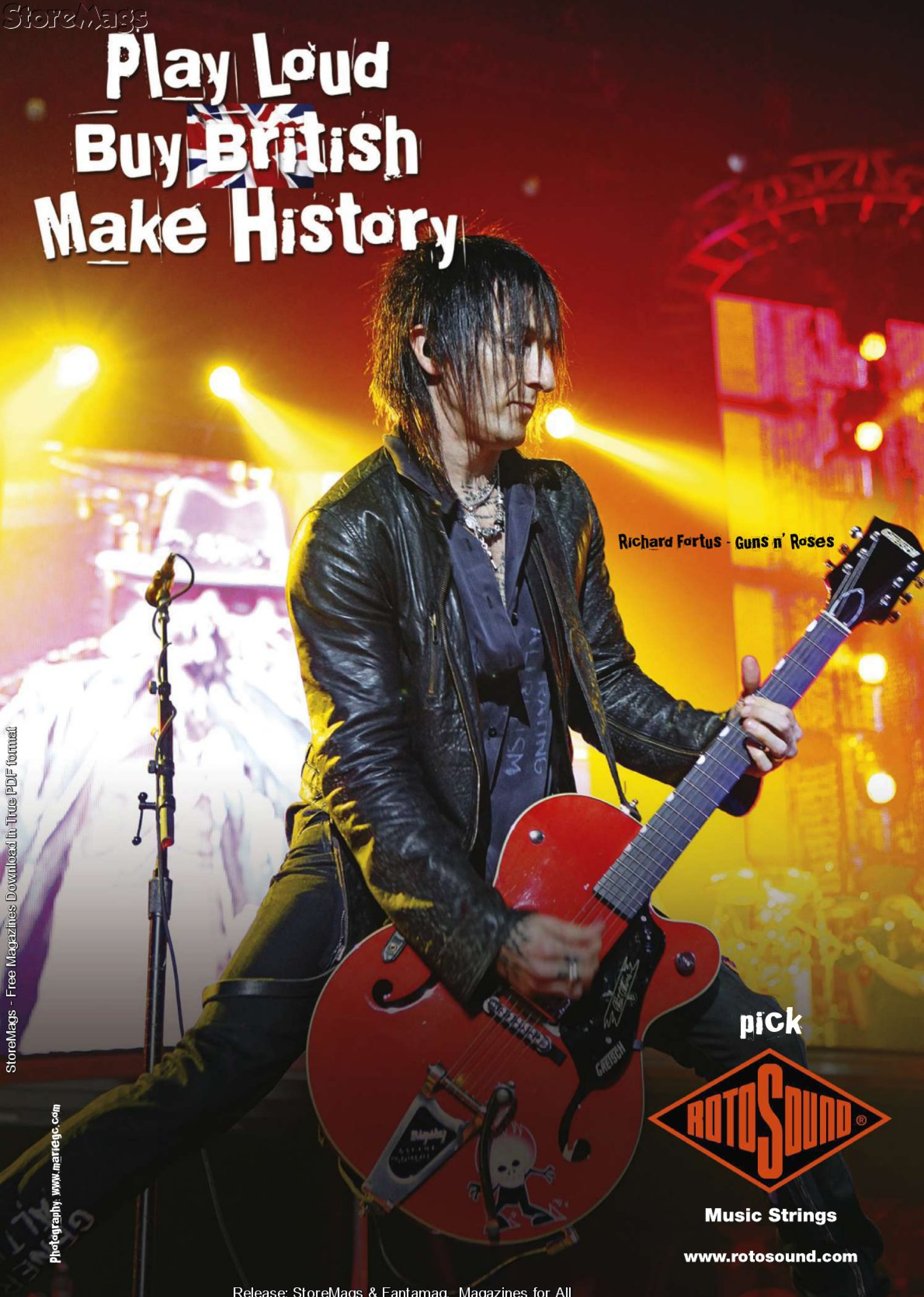
Play Loud Buy British Make History



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Hello IPSWICH!

So downloads are denting the wallets of the record companies, and musicians are feeling the CD sales pinch too. Is there an upside? Maybe so, reckons Adi Vines: there may be a damn fine band coming to a local – yes! local – venue near you soon

I've recently been sitting around with my feet up, swilling tea and perusing the kind of glossy music magazines that usually have a worldwide mega-selling artist on the cover – and I'm pleasantly pleased by what I'm seeing. I don't mean up the front end with the tittle-tattle and reader's letters, but further on toward the back, after the reviews and obligatory plug for Glastonbury but before the ads for CD storage.

The latest round of tour adverts contain plenty of words that I haven't seen on any tour itinerary for a long time... words like Lancaster Sugarhouse, for example. The last time I heard those particular words was when a friend was holding my hair out of the way while I threw up in the sink (my years are measured in hair loss, which is how I can accurately gauge how many years ago this actually was). Anyway, the point is that after years of UK tours consisting of London, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham and that's yer lot, it seems like some brave souls have decided to go further afield to bring their message to the masses.

It's a trend that I first saw signs of a couple of years ago, when a winter tour by an up-and-coming 'indie' type artist included dates in Frome, Falmouth and Bangor. It was around the same time that the Lincoln Engine Shed venue started appearing in the schedule of most acts of a similar persuasion. Elsewhere, Athlete recently visited Folkstone and Warrington, and poor old KT Tunstall obviously drew the short straw and agreed to play in Grimsby.

Once upon a time, not long ago, you would never dream of going up to Scotland and not playing Edinburgh and Dundee (and perhaps Aberdeen too) as well as Glasgow. Wales is similarly neglected, with Cardiff and possibly Swansea being as far as most will go. Meanwhile, over on the east coast, the place where I first saw the Clash, Bridlington Spa, is making an appearance on someone's list of dates for next year. It's obvious that the venues have not gone away, and that booking managers are waiting by the phone with their diaries open.

I'd love to see UK tours lasting for at least a month once again. Punters wouldn't have to drive to some soulless shed in a major city to see their favourite artists, and a proper slog around the country would do wonders for spineless, whingeing musicians (or put them off forever, which will just make room for someone more hardy). There is no excuse except sheer laziness for not going to Southend Cliffs Pavilion, Hull University or Northampton Roadmenders. I know touring is expensive but, let's face it, the amount of money that gets wasted on a daily basis in the music business would keep dozens of bands on the road indefinitely.

A proper slog around the country would do wonders for spineless musicians. There is no excuse except laziness for not going to Southend Cliffs Pavilion

With very little financial support forthcoming from record companies for touring artists, making money from touring is now vital. Therefore (and it may take a major change in behaviour from the top down) if artists took a realistic look at how their money is spent, sacrificed just a small degree of their comfort and surrounded themselves with competent, efficient personnel then there's no reason that a long tour at theatre level upwards could not turn a profit... or at the very least, not make a loss. And people like me would get to see what the inside of Skegness Embassy Theatre looks like. How good would that be, eh?

Adi Vines has worked with Radiohead, the Sex Pistols, the Darkness, Razorlight and others. See www.xselectronics.co.uk for more

Guitar

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Star Letter

Rats and DS-1 pedals: rubbish with tranny?

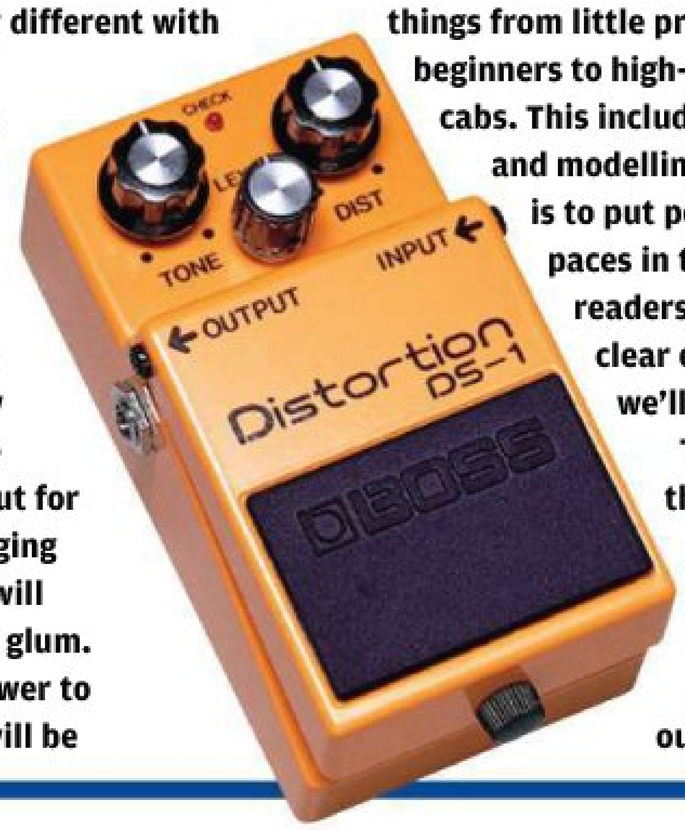
BUDGETING FOR THE FACTS

I am poor. If I want something, I get it from eBay and have to sell something first. I have a well-known make of transistor amplifier, which means I have a very annoying problem: that is, there is simply no point in me reading reviews of overdrive or distortion pedals in *Guitar & Bass* because you only test them with valve amps, and they sound completely different with transistor amps.

A pedal that sounds wonderful with a valve amp may well sound like the baked beans scene from *Blazing Saddles* with a transistor amp. I know from bitter experience that anyone shelling out for a DS-1 or Rat and plugging into a transistor amp will quickly become rather glum.

But you have the power to change this, and you will be enriching the lives of the hordes of transistor amp-owning guitarists out there if you do. Just simply test pedals with both types of amplifier!

Dean Heward
Blaydon On Tyne



G&B: **We take your point regarding the fact that pedals can give very different results. However, we do review pedals on a range of things from little practice amps aimed at beginners to high-end combos, heads and cabs. This includes transistors, valves and modelling technology. The idea is to put pedals through their paces in the same ways as our readers. If we don't make this clear enough, we apologise; we'll do better in future.**

The reason why we go to this trouble is that pedals are idiosyncratic beasties. Some even only come to life when used with a certain output tube type, while others seem to be fine through a variety of amps, including solid state. The alchemy of amps and pedals has baffled many down the years, but it's great when you find something that really works for you.

ARIA

Written a Star Letter? Contact Aria on 0148 323 8720 to arrange delivery of your Fusion gig bag – electric, acoustic and bass models are all available!

NOT QUITE ON THE MARK

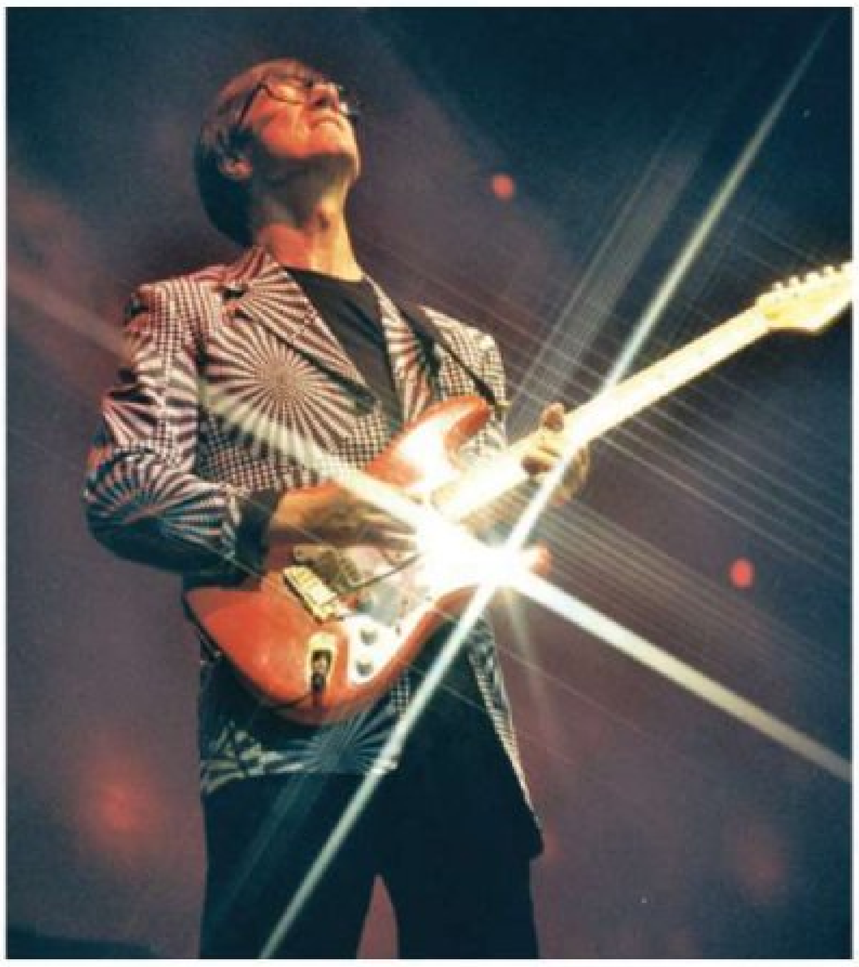
Having read Mark Cottey's reply (Dec 10) to my letter in the November issue, first of all I'd like to apologise if I caused any upset.

My original letter was in criticism of the particular issue of *Guitar & Bass* (Sep 10), not specifically at Ben Greener. I wonder how many people out there who have paid several hundred or even thousands of pounds will agree with Mark's 'lump of wood and wires' description of guitars?

With regard to Brian May an Van Halen's guitars that cost, to quote Mark, 'sod all to make' – I have worked on quite a lot of replicas and I wouldn't have one as a gift. However, the two aforementioned players could make almost any guitar sound great. I have read three later issues and found them to be much more interesting (but I'll bet somebody hasn't).

Pete Griffin
via email

G&B: **Thanks for reassuring people that you weren't having a go at Ben Greener, Pete. We did take your original letter as a criticism of us, not Ben, which is why we printed it; we're not in the business of laying into teenagers who love guitars. The reason we went ahead and published your thoughts was to try to start a debate regarding what we deem worth covering: do readers value great instruments more than great stories, or is it the personality of the people behind the collections? Thanks to everyone who took the time and trouble to share their ideas about this – we're going to use the info to try and make *Private Collection* even better in future. As to your final point, Pete – well, as much as we try to please everybody, we have to recognise that not everybody's going to love everything in the magazine. The idea is to find out why and, where possible, correct it.**



HANK YOU KINDLY

After making many enquiries in many directions, without success, I wonder if you or your many readers can help me out with a problem.

I have been a guitarist, both professional and semi, since 1960, but had to retire due to osteo-arthritis. This being the case, I now get pleasure by playing alone at home to jamming discs.

However, about a year ago, my Zoom 505 MkII was taken from my house by a friend, my Shadows jamming disc was in the box with it, and it is my favourite disc. If anyone could enlighten me through your magazine as to where I can get another, I would be eternally grateful.

The first one was downloaded by a friend of my brother who has since emigrated and I've lost touch. Needless to say, the

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GUITAR GYM

NECK CORE STRENGTH LEVEL 2

Following on from last issue's neck core stability exercise, we're going to move forwards by working the muscles against some resistance. Once again, stand against a wall or sit on a chair, and place one fist (or a small ball) between your neck and your chest. Sit or stand with your head upright, eyes looking forward. From this position, perform your nodding movement so your chin touches your fist and squeeze against your fist. Hold the contraction for five seconds, slowly release, and return to a neutral position with your head and neck, eyes looking forward. Repeat 10 times, twice a day. Keep the hold against resistance at five seconds for the first week, and if you have no difficulties, increase the holding time to 10 seconds. Make sure your are keeping the chin tucked in, not poking forward. In the next issue, we will be progressing this exercise once more – it's quite difficult, so practice to make sure you're ready!

Got a health issue that affects your playing? Marion Turner is a physio specialising in musicians' injuries. Write to us, and we'll get her on to it

'friend' gives me a wide berth these days.

Chris Parker
Bradford

G&B: **Shame on that friend of yours, Chris. There are quite a lot of packages out there that (legally) allow you to play along with the Shadows, and if anyone has any recommendations, please let us know. There's a company out there that produce Hank Marvin backing track CDs at the request of Hank himself. Contact Mustang Music Ltd, Unit 21K, Vale Business Park, Cowbridge, Glamorgan CF71 7PF, phone 01446 775050, www.mustang-music.com. Best of luck in finding the right backing for your playing.**

FROM THE HUDSON TO THE SWANSEA

Back in December 2004, I followed your suggestion and took up the challenge of the mandolin. However, in spite of being supplied a lovely Ozark by the very knowledgeable John Vickers (Vintage Strings, Cheltenham), I found that it was just too tricky.

In short, the scale and fingerboard width were better suited to a pixie than myself, and over the next few years the hots to plink-plink it out on a mandolin came and went with little progress. In the late summer of last year, though, I found myself in Cranes of Cardiff. Their big cheese Mike Podesta drew my attention to a tenor guitar, made for them by the Hudson Guitar Co. As the story goes, a retired Devon luthier agreed that Mike could send one of his guitars to be factory-replicated in China. Mike also told me that in the Swansea branch they had a prettier, flame mahogany version.

Well, Swansea is my home town, so I spent a lot of time lolly-gagging around this flattop cutie. However, £550 just before Christmas is never easy to find, and of course the old question 'Do you really need another guitar?' rattled around my ears. Fortunately, the answer always came back as 'Well, actually, yes, I do'. Woody Allen once said that he could resist everything except temptation.

Luckily, Cranes is famous for its January sales, and when the New Year arrived, £550 was now £399 and I said 'Yes, please.' The 23" scale and skinny banjo neck make it feel like cradling a baby. Despite that, it's very loud; the volume and the projection is remarkable, and if you do regularly require more, it has a bug fitted so it can be easily plumbed in... blimey.

Old tenors cost less than their six-string equivalents. Hurrah!

I've tuned it to GDAE, and its high register gives it a kind of almost medieval, lute-ish quality (or in my hands, more evil and loutish). All this said, the real delight is that it's so well made and it plays really beautifully.

So now, the future. Suddenly the mandolin doesn't seem quite so impossible... and, of course, how many other four-string instruments are strung in fifths? My Hudson tenor has been a really uplifting find – almost as valuable as my subscription to your mag.

So how about a feature on tenor guitars? You could include players, a playing history and a review of instruments available to generally spread the joy of these little charmers.

Bob Overstall
Swansea

G&B: **A fine notion. We're glad you and your tenor are getting on famously. We're big fans of them here. Reading your story, it's funny how people find guitars that really speak to them. People go from six-string to bass, electric to acoustic (and vice versa). We hate to use the phrase 'going on a journey' but it's always good to see people trying out new things and finding the right instrument for them.**

EDITOR'S LETTER

Having gone to a few guitar shows recently, it was great to see a very healthy number of people enjoying the delights on offer. Many thanks to all the readers who took the time and trouble to talk to me – all your insights are greatly appreciated.

Several of our conversations revolved around what I call 'buyer's torture'. One person started explaining that although they didn't *need* another guitar, he'd been on the lookout for a particular model for ages and now he'd had the opportunity to have a go on one. There then followed a detailed argument about how massively it would improve his playing... and his life in general.

I know everything about this kind of dilemma, and I'm sure you do too. I've tried every trick in the book to justify a purchase or a non-purchase, but nothing's really worked. I've just learned to accept that this kind of mental (and, on plenty of occasions, financial) angst is all part of the process. I could, of course, just not buy anything – but that's just silly talk.

Enjoy the issue...

John

John Callaghan
EDITOR
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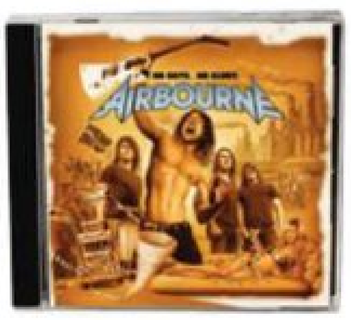
From fey to rocking to totally indescribable, these are our favourite guitar CDs of 2010

Albums Of The Year

To be in with a chance of winning 2010's finest 20 long-players just answer this simple question: Which album of the year winner is a member of rock legends Led Zep? Answers on a postcard to the usual address marked *Stairway To 2011*. Usual T&Cs apply and the editor's decision is final

Airbourne
No Guts No Glory
(Roadrunner)



Striding assuredly out from beneath the AC/DC comparisons, Airbourne have emerged as a mighty, snarling behemoth of a band. From the starter's gun, *No Guts No Glory* has you firmly by the scruff. These four Aussie horsemen are on a Marshall-fuelled express-train mission to rock, and we'd be frankly irresponsible to interfere. Full-tilt riffs, full-tilt attitude, full-tilt everything.

Jeff Beck
Emotion And Commotion
(Rhino)

Seven years have passed since 2003's *Jeff* album and Beck has reawakened the old magic, once again leaving us green-eyed at his command over a Fender. Whether reimagining *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* with its silvery-voiced guitar line or tackling Screamin' Jay Hawkins' *I Put A Spell On You* (aided by Joss Stone), Beck and his supporting cast will make you giddy.

Black Country Communion
Black Country Communion
(Mascot)

Plenty of '70s swagger comes flowing forth when the 'Voice Of Rock' Glenn Hughes dons his Precision bass and saddles up alongside Joe Bonamassa, Jason Bonham and Derek Sherinian. Many turn their nose up at the mere concept of a 'supergroup', but this one's hard to knock. Seriously big riffs, unfussy production, quality musicianship and some damn fine stadium-sized tunes.

The Black Keys
Brothers
(V2 Coop)

Often cruelly dismissed by the blues-rock police as indie pretenders, this duo continue to nonchalantly release some of the best albums ever made in the genre. Recorded at Muscle Shoals, their sixth LP is a more spooky, soul-driven affair; earlier LPs nailed the vibe of sweaty juke joints, now the ghosts of Stax make their presence thrillingly felt. Prepare for goose-bumps.

Black Label Society
Order Of The Black
(Roadrunner)

His days as Ozzy's hired gun are over, but with an apparently unending armoury of signature axes and his own Black Label Bunker studio, Zakk Wylde seems unperturbed. The crunching metal, lawless divebombs and obligatory pinch harmonics are all present and correct, but it's when Wylde hangs up his biker jacket and settles at the piano stool that he reaches really unexpected heights.

Eric Clapton
Clapton
(Warner Bros)

Clapton delves into the past to unearth a heady selection of dusty blues. It takes a brave man to take on standards such as *Rocking Chair* and truly own them, but thankfully he succeeds where many others have fallen short. *Run Back To Your Side* is the only original here, and it stands up nicely, but it's the gently persuasive *Autumn Leaves* that leaves us impressed.

Buddy Guy
Living Proof
(Sony Music)

'I'm 74 years young,' intones Buddy in a mock croak as an introduction to his finest album in years. No need to worry, there's plenty of life in the old fella yet – and just a matter of seconds later he hits us with a solo that could buckle the fingers of a 21 year-old. Just sit back and enjoy as Buddy's colourful life story is set to astounding fretwork and delivered as a fiery, forthright sermon.

Jimi Hendrix
Valleys Of Neptune
(Sony Music)

NEW HENDRIX ALBUM! Well, sort of, but not really (especially if you're the kind of Jimi fan who has hoovered up other posthumous releases). Yet this collection of loose-limbed alternate takes on the likes of *Sunshine Of Your Love* and song tryouts for Jimi's unfinished fourth album make you fall in love with him all over again. A timely reminder, if one was needed, of how great a guitar player he was.

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Woke Up This Mornin' Albums Of The Year

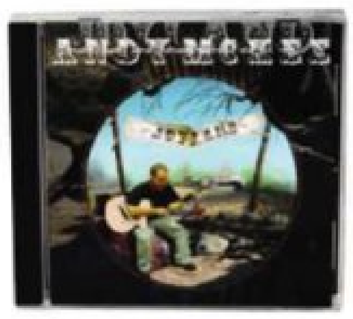
Bill Kirchen
Word To The Wise
(Proper)

Humble, humourous and downright brilliant, the Titan Of The Telecaster flexes his Dieselbilly muscle with a fine cast of collaborators in the wings. *Bump On Wood* is the ultimate twang-fest, *Man At The Bottom Of The Well* with Elvis Costello's vocal sneer is a highlight, and closer *Valley Of The Moon* with the late, great Norton Buffalo and his harmonica is as poignant as they come. 10/10.

Laura Marling
I Speak Because I Can
(Virgin)

Marling's debut *Alas, I Cannot Swim* charmed the folk scene back in 2008, and this follow-up is likely to further that romance. Banjos pluck, snare drums shuffle and fiddles scrape, all in support of Marling's unwavering charisma. Despite plumping for more stately orchestration this time round, Marling's enchanting turn of phrase and storytelling nature are the backbone that lets this stand proud.

Andy McKee
Joyland
(Proper)



Initially serenading an audience of over 34 million via YouTube, McKee has further refined his acoustic prowess for fourth album *Joyland*. Covers include a nod to acoustic architect Michael Hedges (*Layover*) and a buoyant take on *Everybody Wants To Rule The World*. Otherwise it's all McKee, tapping, slapping and strumming his way through a playful collection of instrumental gems.

Pat Metheny
Orchestrion
(Nonsuch)

Far from your ordinary album, *Orchestrion* shows off the harmony between man and machine. Without a flat-pack in sight, Metheny assembled his own take on a 19th century mechanical device that conducts a room full of musical furniture over which his guitar could elegantly flutter. Far-flung arrangements and an eerily robotic edge make this unlike anything else.

Robert Plant
Band Of Joy
(Decca)

Do we really need Led Zep to reform when Robert Plant can produce solo work as thrilling as this? Through bluegrass, blues and R&B, seasoned sideman Buddy Miller is a revelation, effortlessly switching from rootsy riffage to soaring leads with intense artistry. Trad tunes and obscure covers come alive in strange and new ways under Plant's adept stewardship; a band of joy indeed.

Renegade Creation
Renegade Creation
(Provogue)

With both Robben Ford and Michael Landau on board a heap of dazzling virtuosity was always assured, but this is no showboating fest. Along with Jimmy Haslip (bass) and Gary Novak (drums) the outfit comes over as a real band with taut, punchy songs of A-grade quality that meld tough rock and blues with only a pinch of the predicted jazziness. A dream team on a winning streak.

She & Him
Volume Two
(Double Six)

Much-admired songsmith M Ward has always retained an air of mystery with his various outpourings. Now he's paired up with the smoky-voiced siren (and film starlet) Zooey Deschanel, he may find it very hard to stay below the radar. Accessible and melodic yet retaining a wild authenticity, She & Him stir up fresh images of a rosy-tinted past that can't fail to win you round. Dive in.

Slash
Slash
(Roadrunner)

Slash took a page out of Santana's cookbook with this collection of collaborations. Some are of the 'What!?' variety (Fergie from the Black-Eyed Peas, anyone?) but among the many stormers on here are tracks cut with true rock soulmates including Ozzy, Lemmy and Iggy Pop. Slash plays a blinder, and he's a comforting guitar constant in this crazy, mixed-up world.

Sparrow & The Workshop
Crystals Fall
(Distiller)

Hailing from Glasgow via Wales and America, Sparrow And The Workshop distilled their EPs (with Paul Savage behind the desk) to bring us *Crystals Fall*. Think lunging alt-folk nimbly treading the line between sickly sweet and jarringly sour. Think lumbering drum rolls and sparky lyrics. Think passion – and Jill O'Sullivan's stirring voice had us sucked in from the first word.

Richard Thompson
Dream Attic
(Proper)

Recorded live to maintain that all-important immediacy yet utterly flawless in its execution, *Dream Attic* is the perfect platform for Ivor Novello Award-winning Thompson to shine. Whether cutting greedy bankers down to size, revealing his emotional hand for all to see or simply dazzling with his masterful touch, Thompson puts a fresh slant on the live album format. Essential.

The Union
The Union
(Payola)

It begins with a visceral blast of heavy blues that pairs Ex-Thunder axeman Luke Morley with Winterville singer Pete Shoulder, and then surpasses all expectations. Classic rock moves can slip easily into parody, but smart twists keep this fresh and dynamic. From Americana to muscular power ballads, *The Union* stirs the parts that only sincere balls-out rock action can.

Ray Wylie Hubbard
A.Enlightenment B.Endarkenment...
(Bordello)

Gruff, lyrical blues from a grizzled Texas slide guitar man who pulls no punches as he wrestles in a wry style with the thorny subjects of sin and redemption. 'I'm partial to ole Hooker singing *Crawling King Snake*, and I know Muddy Waters is as deep as William Blake' he growls, even managing to list his favourite guitar sounds in the same song. In our book that makes him a true poet.

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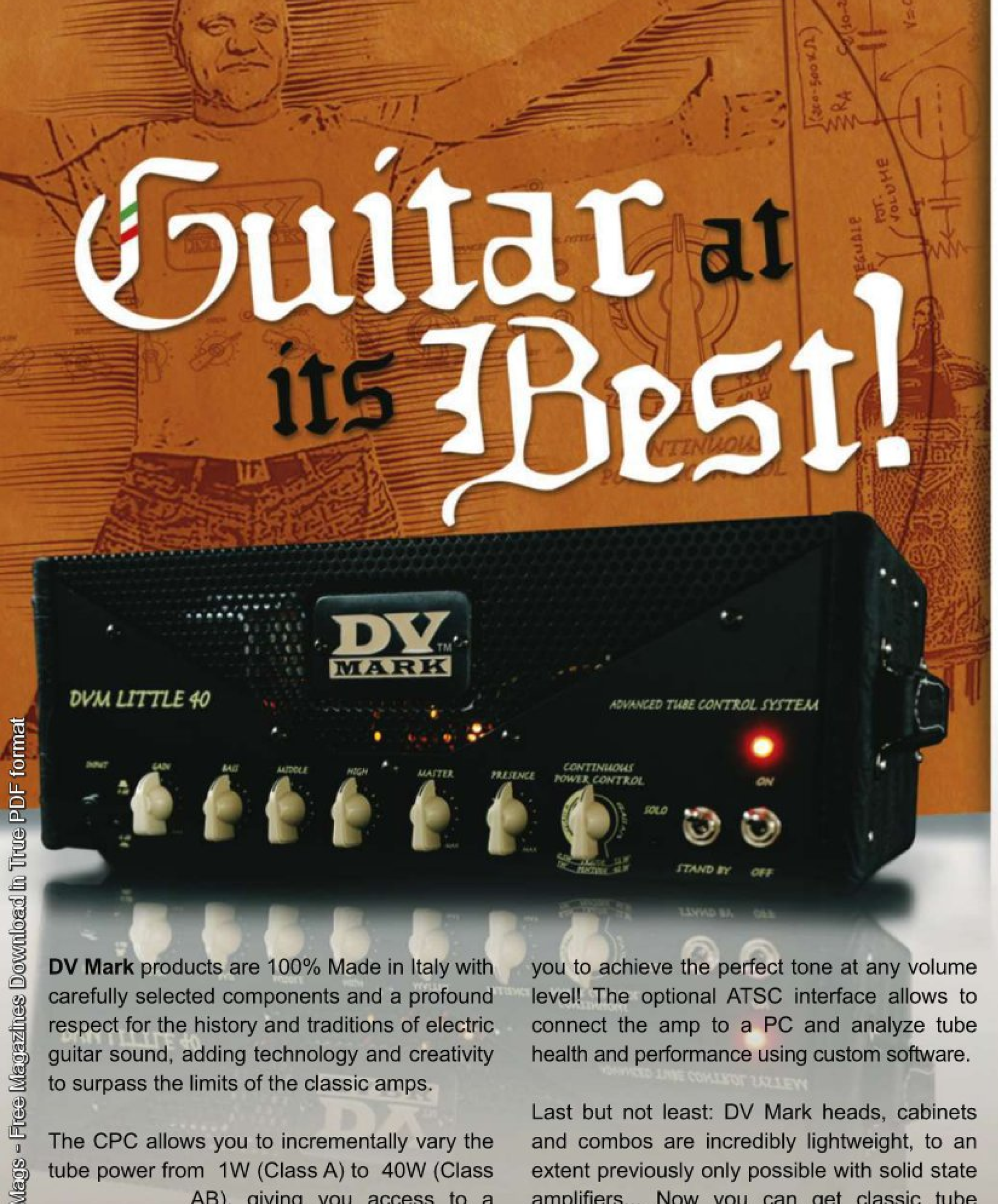

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*CPC: Continuous Power Control

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Quiet Riot

If it wasn't for one man and his work, our licks would still be rudely interrupted by buzzing, humming and general audio detritus. Rik Flynn discovers why Seth Lover, the inventor of the humbucker, deserves his place on the guitar podium of fame

History is always going to remember the Leo Fenders and Les Pauls of this world thanks to the ease in which their eye-pleasing, iconic guitar designs slotted into popular culture and swiftly became enduring symbols of rock'n'roll. Pickups, on the other hand, were never likely to command quite the same level of adoration. While the designers of Fender and Gibson's flagship instruments died heroes of the guitar world, Seth Lover – the man behind Gibson's groundbreaking humbucker – could have slipped away from us penniless and forgotten, but for one man.

'Towards the last few years of his life, Seth was living in relative obscurity,' remembers Seymour Duncan. 'For me to say he lived a very simple life without much money is really putting things better than they were. When he was in his mid-80s, to supplement his meagre pension and social security, Seth worked delivering vacuum cleaners.'

Although enthusiasts were of course aware of Lover, most were (and still are) blind to the debt that we guitarists owe to him. It was not until Seymour Duncan came into the picture that Lover's fortunes were reversed.

'I feel I, along with my company, rescued Seth from that obscurity and let the music world know who he was and what his contributions were,' Duncan continues. 'Suddenly he was in advertisements and the guitar press was clamouring to interview him. Also, during his last three years, he had money for the first time thanks to the royalty checks he received from sales of the Seth Lover pickup.

'I'm very proud of my relationship with Seth and what the Seymour Duncan company did with him during his last few years.'

Two original Gibson humbuckers with the hallowed 'Patent Applied For' sticker

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Photo: Backbeat

Above, Seth Lover at work. Below, Lover's original winding machine for the PAF prototypes

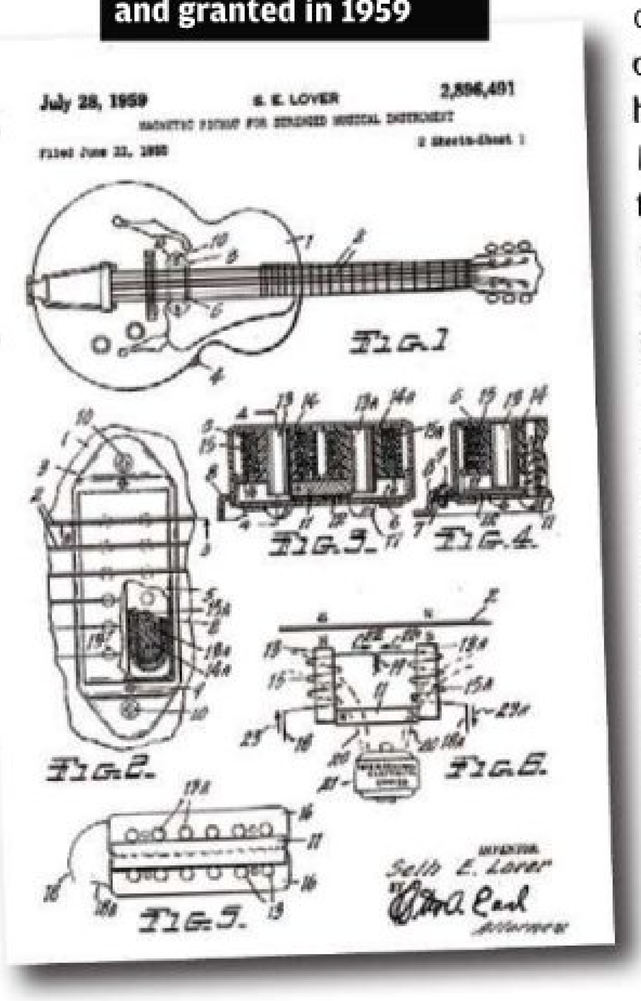
Blast From The Past

It's hard to imagine a world without the humbucker in an age when self-tuning guitars, built-in MIDI controllers and modelling technology have become commonplace, but prior to Seth Lover's invention that's the world guitarists were living (and humming) in. Much like any fresh idea it took a while to catch on, for the Gibson humbucker was a new competitor on the block joining a world still dominated by the single coil – the super-bright Fender guitar sound.

'The PAF's initial impact was moderate – Strat and Teles were already well established,' explains Tim Mills, founder of Bare Knuckle pickups. 'The main impact seems to come a little later, in the '60s. Live music was getting a lot louder, so humbuckers really came into their own.'

Although Lover applied for his patent in 1955, he didn't receive it until four years later. In the interim Gibson attached the famous 'Patent Applied For' decal on the underside of the pickups to scare off copyists, so Lover's humbuckers became known as 'PAFs' (in 1962, the decal was replaced by a sticker that read 'Patent No. 2,737,842'. Strangely, this number wasn't for Lover's humbucker at all, it was for Les Paul's bridge/tailpiece; some suggest that this was an intentional red herring.) So, although mostly falling on deaf ears at their inception, PAFs have become the stuff of legend, fetching big money and hallowed as the Holy Grail of sound generators.

The humbucker patent application in the name of SE Lover, filed in 1955 and granted in 1959



If you're wondering what all the fuss about, just listen to Duane Allman and his sunburst Les Paul or Albert King and his Flying V in full swing, and all will become clear. In the words of Seymour Duncan, 'this pickup changed guitar music for all time.'

Pickup Lines

Lover's humbucker was by no means the first of its kind, hence the delay in granting the patent. The 'humbucking coil' was brought to the world by Albert 'Al' Kahn and Lou Burroughs of Electro-Voice in 1934. This duo were also among the first to use the now industry-standard 'Alnico' magnets (a blend of aluminium, nickel and cobalt). Kahn and Burroughs didn't have guitars in mind, though, and while their story is an essential part of the picture, their invention was only ever used in microphones and PA systems.

Other humbucking concepts date back to the '30s, and no less than six previous applications were waiting for Lover when he filed for his patent. Armand F Knoblaugh filed a piano pickup patent in 1935 which could be used for other instruments with vibrating steel strings. Although involving two 'stacked' pickups (with the core magnetising the strings) as opposed to placing them 'side-by-side', this design was well ahead of its time, and Lover certainly saw it.

On top of this design there were also those installed in lap steel guitars, like the beautiful 1930s art deco-inspired Vega that housed two pickups side by side. Regardless, Lover is the man synonymous with the humbucker, and his design is certainly the most influential. Tim Mills is testament to that; 'It's been the foundation of every humbucker design I've ever made,' he says. Lofty praise indeed.

Silence Is Golden

Gibson's own single-coils had developed fast since their unwieldy but great-sounding attempts of the mid-'30s. By the early '50s, most Gibson electrics were based around the 'Alnico' model or the P90. When Gibson's Ted McCarty asked Lover to begin work on a new pickup, he was keen. 'I said, instead of just a new pickup, why don't I make an improved one?' said Lover. 'Something the industry needs, which is get rid of the darn hum whenever you got close to an amplifier.'

Lover was able to use his experience with tube amplifiers that used a 'choke coil' – a transformer or coil that helped reduce the unwanted noise. With the 'choke' as his starting point, Lover developed a technique of wiring two coils in series but electrically out of phase with

The world's first-ever humbucker? A Vega steel guitar from 1939

Credit: Fred Kinbom

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each other and with reversed magnetic polarities. In doing so he was able to 'buck' the 'hum'. Lover also employed a 'German Silver' (copper, nickel and zinc) cover that helped reflect electrostatic noises from other electronic sources to help to quell the '60-cycle hum'.

Production PAFs, but not the prototypes, were fitted with adjustable threaded steel polepieces on one of the coils for fine-tuning the string balance. 'Seth told me that Gibson's marketing department wanted adjustable polepieces,' states Duncan. 'However, the prototype had cover indentations where the adjustable polepieces were intended to go on the production versions.'

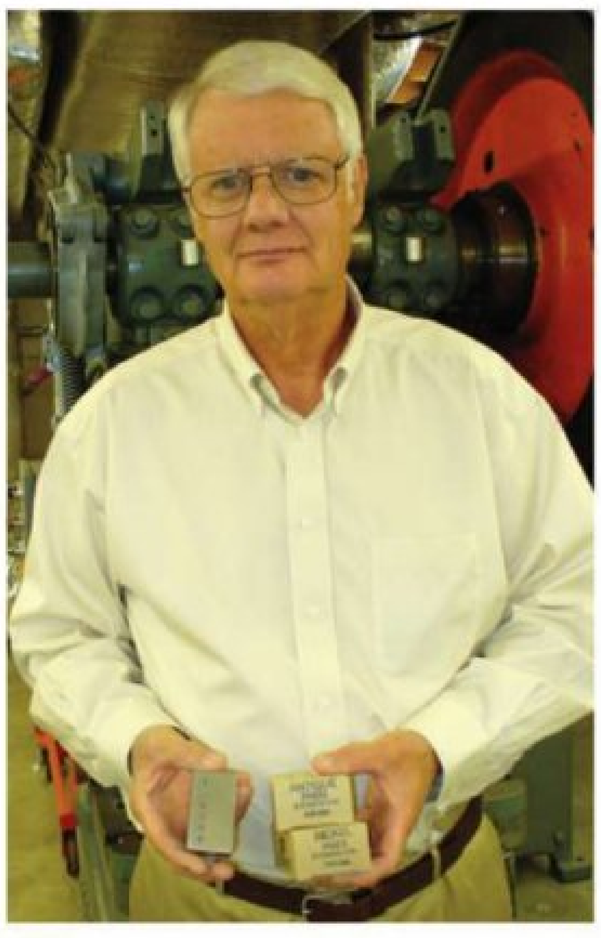
Gibson announced their new creation in the *Gibson Gazette* as 'the ultimate for recording, broadcasting or whenever truly fine performance is required,' and it was finally unveiled at NAMM 1957. While the Les Paul Standard and Custom are the most famous of Gibson's guitars to harbour PAFs, the humbucker was first used in Gibson's steel guitars in '56 and then introduced to some of their archtop models such as the ES-175, ES-295, ES-335, Byrdland, ES-5 Switchmaster, L-5CE, Super 400 and the ES-350T favoured by Chuck Berry.

Hum And Haw

PAFs aren't all good. In fact, some really don't cut it at all. 'A lot of them can be quite one-dimensional,' says Mills. 'Others are head and shoulders above the rest.' So what makes the good ones so damn good and the bad ones so disappointing?

The answer is hardly straightforward. 'Every component combines to make a good pickup,' Duncan explains. 'If you skimp on any of them, it'll come back to haunt you in the end.' As pickup guru Tom Holmes told *Tonequest*, 'Everything makes a difference... but how much of a difference?' And there's the rub.

Tom Holmes: leaving no stone unturned in the quest for great sound



Seth Lover's very first humbucker prototype, mounted in a P90 housing

'Every component combines to make a good pickup. If you skimp, it'll come back to haunt you' – Seymour Duncan

Some of the original materials were chosen for cost and availability as well as their sonic properties. For example, many guitarists fervently insist upon #42 gauge enamel coated wire, but as Lover states, it was specifically chosen 'if you were doing something economically.'

To add to this, only the prototypes were hand-wound; production models were machine-wound with workers 'hand-guiding' the coiling process, resulting in differing tensions. The early winding machines also lacked counters or an auto shut-off mechanism, meaning inconsistent numbers of turns in each coil. Gibson did eventually install a fully-automated system in the mid-to-late '60s leading to more uniformity in later examples (post-PAF), but the winding process alone had a profound effect on the end product.

PAFs from the late '50s to very early sixties roughly measured between 7.5 and 9k Ohms, and later '60s examples have measured as high as 10k. Higher DC resistance equals higher output; in other words, more wire, more volume. Overwound coils create more midrange and less top-end, so the difference is often marked. The two-coils-in-one PAF could often have different coil impedances too, which affected the sound considerably. Renowned pickup maker Lindy Fralin believed this mismatch improved the sound and began making his 'Unbucker' as a result, deliberately mismatching coils to create a brighter sound. Confusing the matter further, it's possible that

The goldtop LP Model of 1957 was the first Gibson Spanish guitar to receive humbuckers

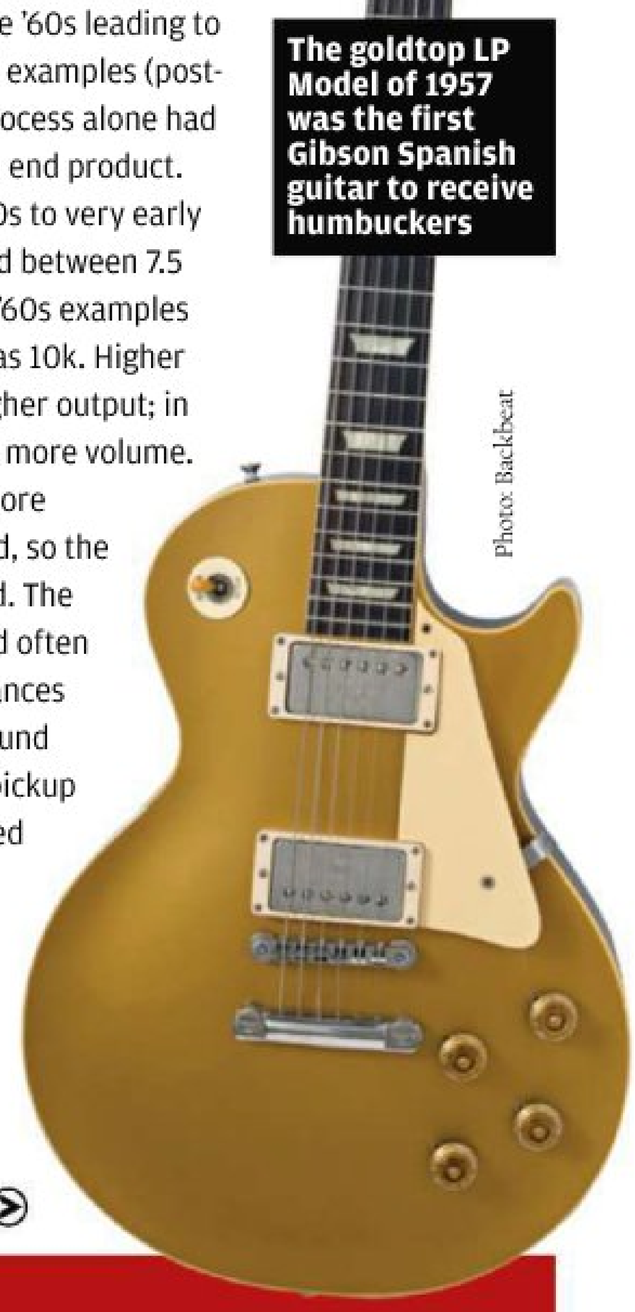
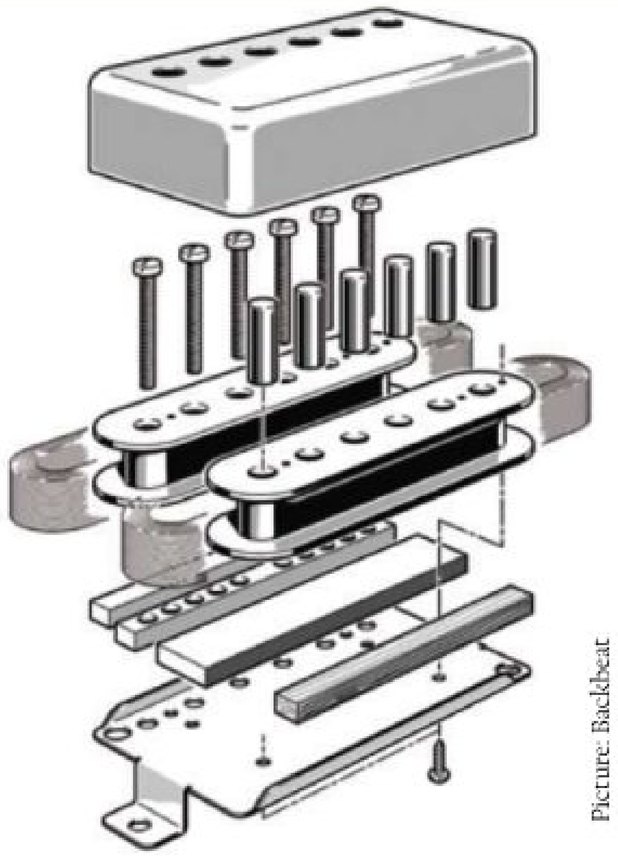


Photo: Backbeat

How Do PAFs Work?

Seth Lover's humbucking pickup design centred around using a double-coil pickup. One coil utilised fixed steel 'slug' polepieces and the other had adjustable threaded steel polepieces. The two coils were placed side by side, and each coil was wound around a butyrate bobbin. The two coils were wound in series but 'out of phase' with each other with opposing magnetic polarities. The result, as Seth Lover put it, was 'a pickup that bucked the hum.'

Lover then put a single bar magnet beneath the coils. The threaded poles passed through a steel bar, allowing contact with the magnet, and the fixed poles had direct contact with them. The entire mechanism rested on the magnet and maple spacers and was housed between a steel bottom plate and a thin nickel silver cover that allowed access to the threaded polepieces.



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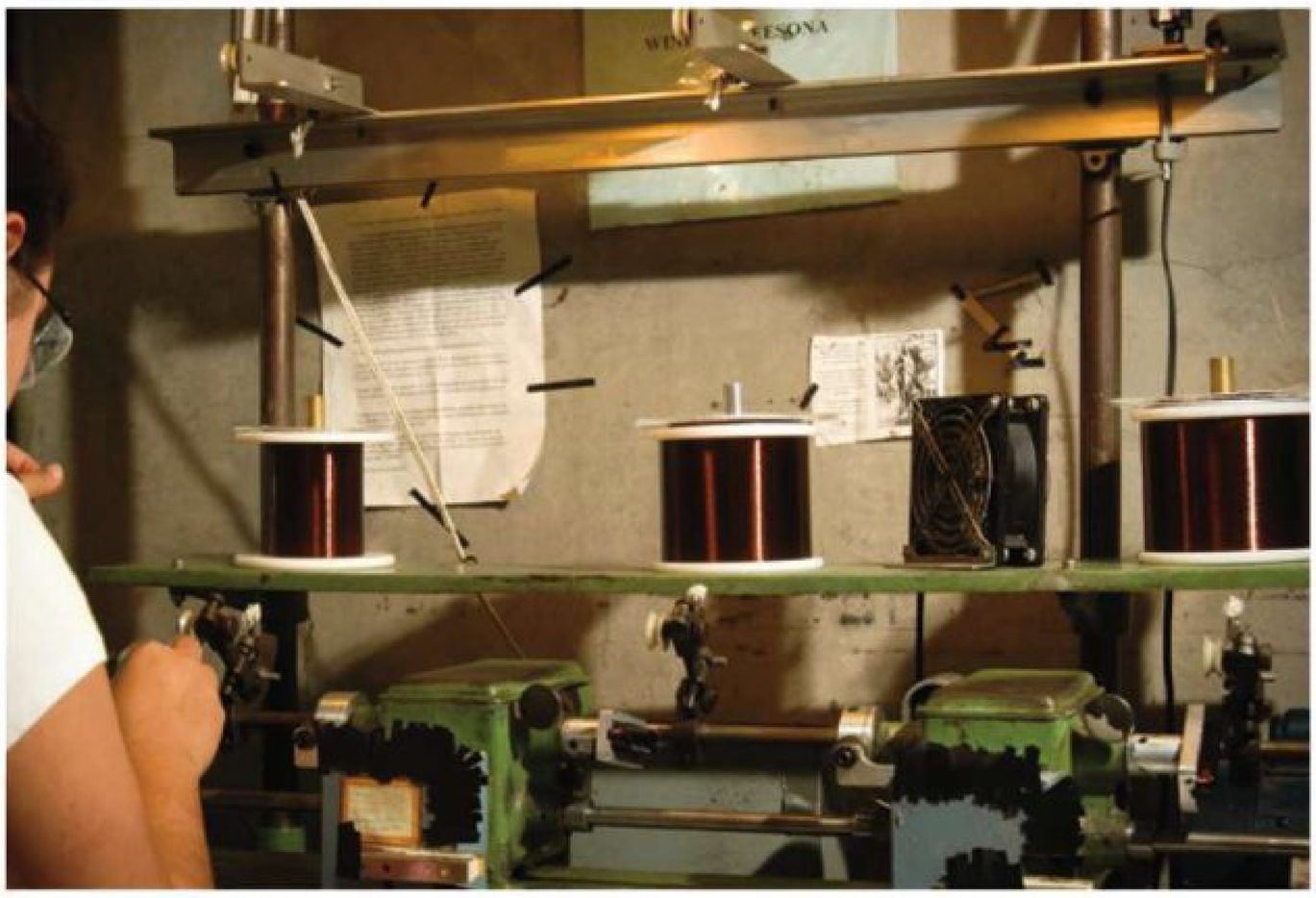
Humbucker Special



Left: Seymour Duncan's vintage Leesona winding machine. Right: Seymour Duncan and Seth Lover

some PAFs were handwired. 'Gibson had hand-winding machines for P90s, so it seems logical that these would be used,' opines Mills. Lover remembers a few being wound by hand: 'I wound sometimes, and if an old pickup was sent back in and they didn't have a machine for winding it then it would be rewound by hand.' So hand-winding certainly did take place – but on what scale is impossible to say.

The wire Gibson used varied too; Lover remembers using most of the major suppliers. 'I wasn't doing the buying,' he continued, 'just using whatever they'd get out of the stockroom.' Wire tolerance can causes huge variations in output, and this certainly plays a part in explaining the wide spectrum of PAF tone.

'Some players say my pickups are weak. If only they'd use a heavier string, they wouldn't have a problem' – Seth Lover

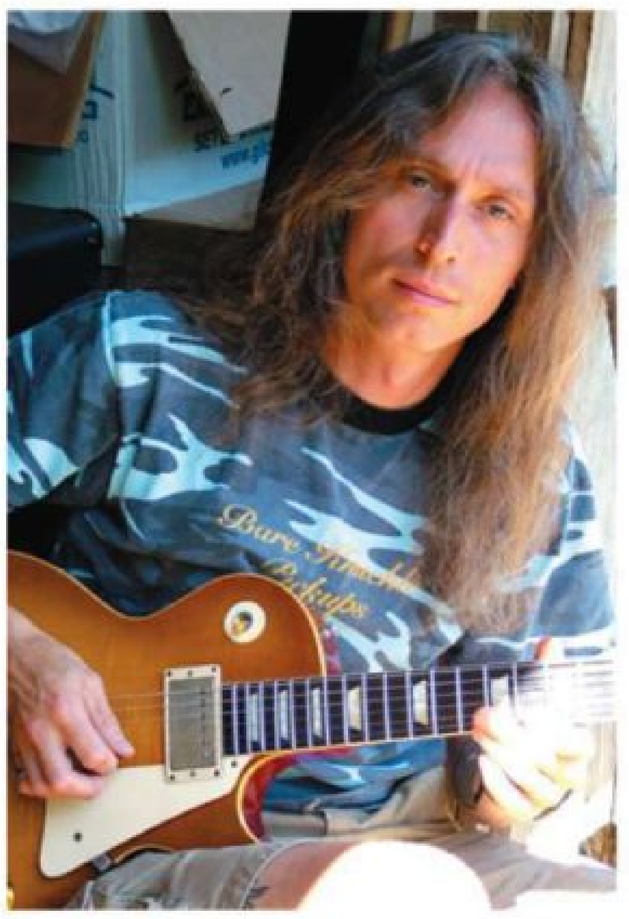
Also, don't forget that PAFs were designed with heavier gauge strings than those favoured today. 'With heavier strings, you get more steel mass,' says Duncan. 'There's more current being induced by the string vibrations.' The sound is altered accordingly: 'Bass frequencies get driven harder, producing a fatter tone with a rounder high,' adds Mills. This means we're experiencing a completely different pickup than the one Lover intended. 'Some players say "my pickups are weak,"' Lover told Duncan. 'If they would only use a heavier string that the pickup was designed for, they wouldn't have any problem.'

Then there's the magnets. 'Once it was thought that one of the reasons PAFs sound so good was that the magnet has slightly demagnetised over time,' Tom Holmes told *Tonequest*. However, the sounds emanating from the guitar stars of the '60s with their fresh, full-power pickups seem to suggest that this degaussing might not be a huge factor.

Does Holmes think the Alnico Gibson was using in the late '50s was somehow special? 'I'm not sure about old magnets versus new magnets,' he says. 'The manufacturing, heat-treating and magnetising processes have probably altered over the years... but how that relates to tone, I don't know.'

Either way, the magnets used by Gibson were by no means identical. 'We didn't care about the thickness varying that much,' said Lover. 'One would be a little bit stronger and another a little weaker. You could live with that.' Gibson sometimes even strayed from the original design. 'Even though Lover stipulated Alnico V, Gibson continued to use existing stock of Alnico II and III bar due to the cost, later using Alnico IV and eventually Alnico V by late 1960,' states Mills. 'The different grades of Alnico all had a considerable effect on the tone.'

On top of all of these inconsistencies, the musicians testing the prototypes often picked up on different things to Lover and evaluated the prototypes differently. 'We finally got to the point where you had to stop... you could have gone on forever and never been exactly perfect,' he recalled.

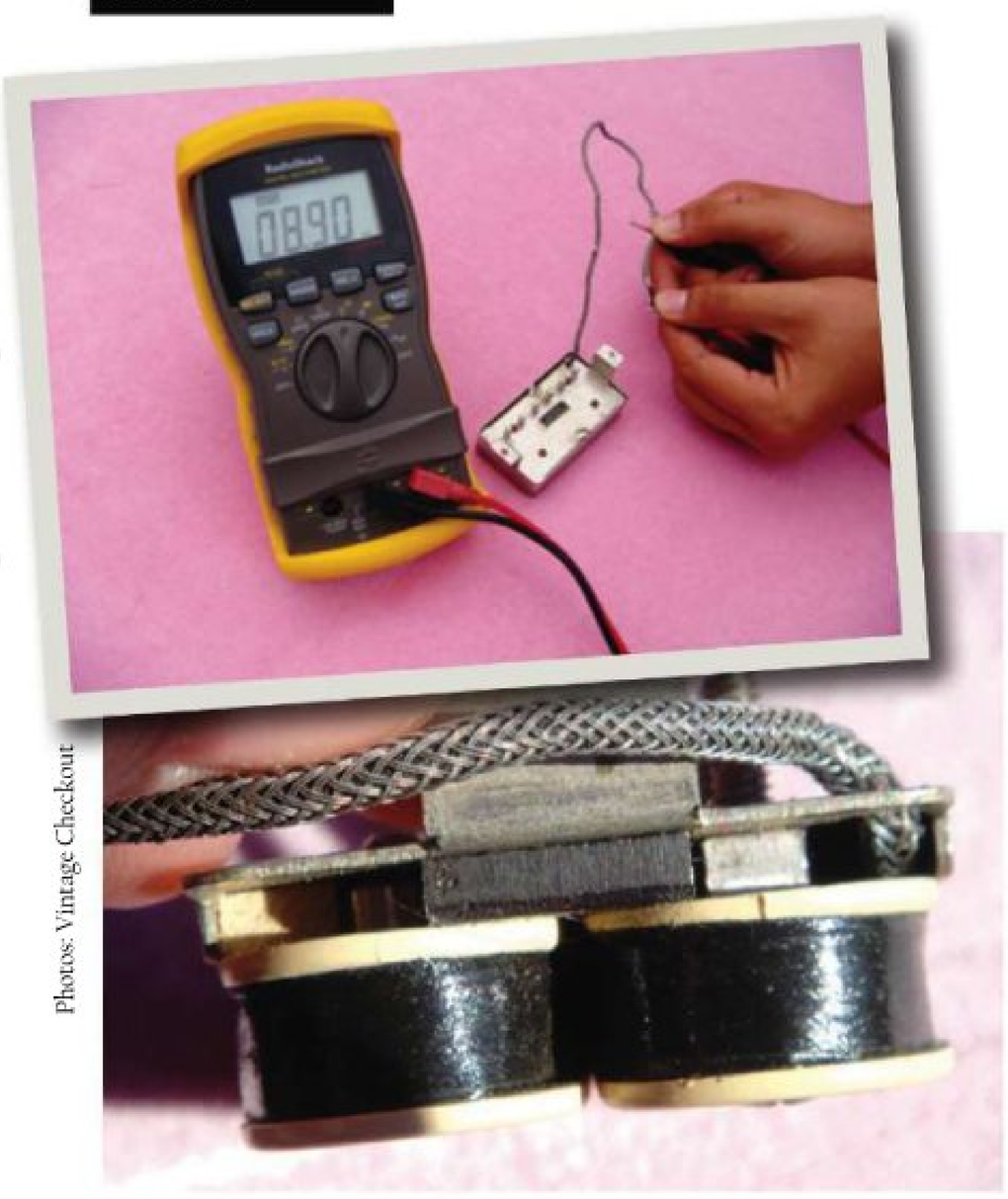


Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle pickups

Picking Up The Baton

There is little doubt that with PAFs Lover got the formula right, and the pros have gone to great lengths to decipher what makes these pickups tick. The question is whether or not such a seminal design can ever be perfectly replicated – or whether it could be even improved upon.

Below: impedance is only one factor in how a pickup will sound



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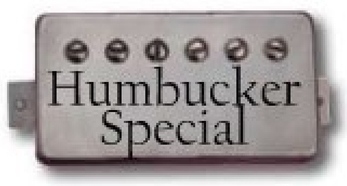


'The fact that the basic principals of the pickup remain largely unchanged in over 50 years is testament to just how respected it actually is,' says Bare Knuckle's Tim Mills. 'There's plenty of scope to explore and enjoy new voicings, but I don't think anyone wants to stray too far from the original formula. I use specially annealed mild steel for pole shoes and original electric steel for slugs and pole screws in humbuckers. All are made to the original dimensions, and the slugs and pole screws are nickel-plated to prevent corrosion. The effect of the heat treatment is more magnetism conducted towards the string for increased power and better definition.'

Tom Holmes has his own approach. 'Since I'm a hand builder I can probably work harder to improve on cosmetics,' say Holmes, 'but Lover had materials manufactured in the '50s and the tone he got combining these materials will never be duplicated by anyone. I can only do my best to assemble materials that are available to me today.'

Above: the PAF's nickel silver cover reflected electrostatic noise. Left: a rare set of black and white 'zebra' bobbins

'The fact that the PAF's basic principles remain unchanged after 50 years is testament to how respected it is' – Tim Mills

Vintage PAFs were not scatterwound, and Seymour Duncan doesn't scatterwind his replicas, but some makers do... such as Bare Knuckle. 'Scatter-winding can only truly be done by hand and represents a high degree of skill,' notes Mills. 'It's time-consuming, but it gives far superior tone and dynamics to conventional machine-winding and mass-production.'

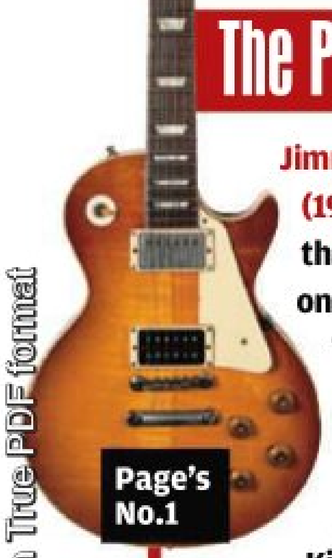
Holmes also hand-winds his pickups. 'The thing I work hardest on is the tension on the wire, using the feel of my fingers – I've been doing it for many years. The wire varies in size, as does the insulation. The age of the insulation and texture makes the wire feel a little different. I always end up winding a coil or two before I can get the proper feel.'

Duncan, on the other hand, remains true to the machine-wound technique. 'I would never hand-wind a PAF-style humbucker,' he says. 'First, that's not how Gibson did it. Second, in order to make a pickup hum-cancelling, the two coils have to be symmetrical. With hand winding, you lose that. Some builders hand-wind humbuckers. It could sound good. Or not. It's not the way the originals were done. In my workshop we have the same Leesona Model 102 winding machine that Gibson used on the PAFs, but we put a digital counter on it with an automatic shutoff. That way we can be precise about the turns and consistent about the tone.'

The PAF's cover is something that modern makers have also spent many hours arduously perfecting. 'We designed the deep-draw tooling based on accurate measurements taken from several PAF covers,' says Duncan. 'We use the same "German silver" formulation that Seth used.' Mills, too, has managed to replicate the formula. 'It took the best part of a year to finalise the tooling before we

Credit: Vintage Checkout

The Players And Their PAFs


Page's No.1

Jimmy Page: Gibson Les Paul Sunburst (1959) Page's No.1 was fitted with PAFs that were supposedly exchanged for the once derided but now sought-after '70s T-Tops. 'When I think of PAF-loaded LPs, Jimmy with a low-slung LP always comes to mind first,' says Tim Mills

Albert King: Gibson Flying V (1959) King's '59 Flying V was powered by a set of original PAFs. The left-handed maestro played much like Hendrix, upside down, but left the strings as they were, allowing him to bend his high strings down instead of up

Peter Green: Gibson Les Paul Standard (1959) Heard on nearly all of Fleetwood Mac's releases and some Mayall material, this guitar has a neck PAF that seems to be backwards. A bodged repair meant that the coils were rewound with reverse polarity, giving Green his 'out of phase' sound

Duane Allman (Allman Brothers) Although Allman had a '59 sunburst, a '58 tobacco sunburst and a '68 SG, his legendary tone was achieved with his '57 Les Paul goldtop with PAFs

Snowy White
Snowy White traded his Strat for a '57 Les Paul goldtop and even attained the nickname 'Gold Top'.

Peter Green

'I put a switch on it to make it out-of-phase, so I push one of the tone controls and it puts it out-of-phase,' says Snowy

Joe Bonamassa: Gibson Les Paul (1959) Bonamassa rates his PAF-powered LP as among his best. 'The main '59 has original PAFs from a '63 ES-335... Those are the best for obvious reasons.'

Snowy White

Jeff Beck: the Telegib
Beck's *Blow By Blow* shows his '54 Les Paul, which gained PAFs in the '70s. However, it also features the Seymour Duncan-made Telegib, a Tele with Gibson stopbar and tailpiece and PAFs from a Flying V that once belonged to Lonnie Mack

Billy Gibbons: Les Paul Standard , aka 'Pearly Gates' (1959) The pickups in Gibbons' favourite Les Paul were replicated by Seymour Duncan for his own 'Pearly Gates' pickups. They have a higher output than many other PAFs

Eddie Van Halen: 'Frankenstrat' Self-described 'tone chaser' Van Halen was a massive fan of Strats, but he also loved the tone of Gibson's PAF – so he combined the two for his legendary 'Frankenstrat'. He installed a PAF in the bridge position that he dipped in paraffin wax in a coffee can! As the string spacing is different, he also angled the pickup to correct the issue

Photos (2): Backbeat Books

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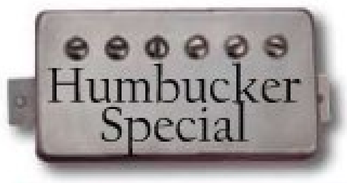

Five Great PAF Alternatives

For those without the money to purchase a set of original PAFs, there are lots of excellent alternatives available. Here's our pick of some of the best...

Tom Holmes: 450/455
As well as making guitars for ZZ Top and Bo Diddley, Tom Holmes is known for making one of the best PAF replicas around, both in sound and appearance. The pickups are handwound and available in very limited quantities. Many rate these higher than the real deal!
£220-£300; www.tomholmescompany.com

Seymour Duncan: SH-55 Seth Lover Model
Seymour Duncan worked with the late great man himself to bring you this model using Lover's actual notes – as good a match for the originals as any
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Bare Knuckle Pickups: The Mule
Bare Knuckle makes handwound pickups of the highest order. The Mule model is built to the same specs as Lover's original PAF, but the coils are scatterwound by hand. Excellent pickups.
From £99; www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Lindy Fralin: Pure PAF
Lindy Fralin's original-style humbucker comes highly recommended by the experts – high output, great character and a smooth tone. A surefire winner
£120; www.fralinpickups.com

Gibson: Classic '57/'57 Classic Plus
Gibson's Tom Holmes-designed Classic '57 comes with a 'Patent Applied For' decal sticker on the baseplate and is an exact replica of the originals. It's also available with gold-plated covers, nickel covers or exposed coils for that extra-rocky look
From £89; www.gibson.com

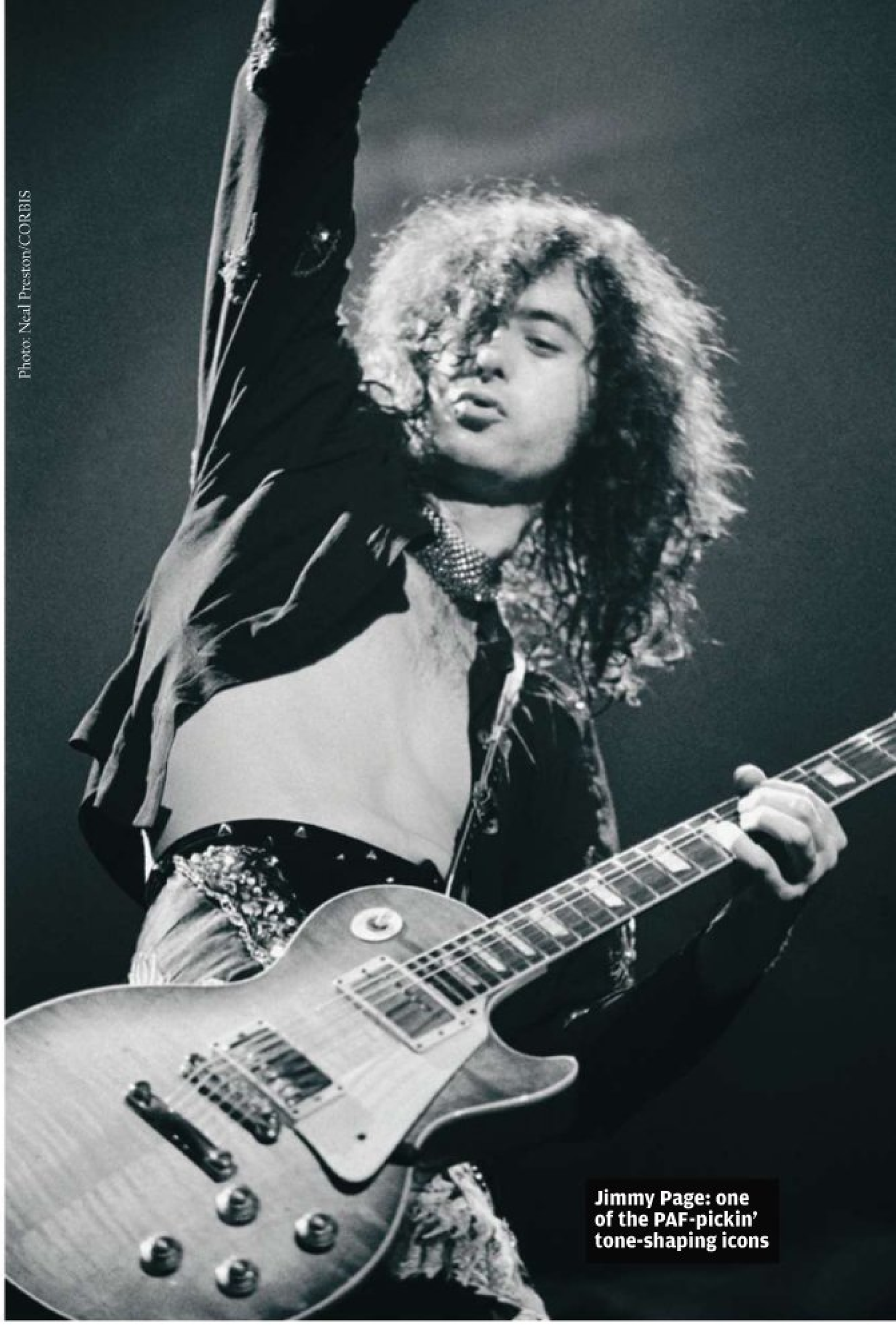

Photo: Neal Preston/CORBIS

Jimmy Page: one of the PAF-pickin' tone-shaping icons

were happy,' he says. 'Then the search was on for the right German nickel silver and to get the plating perfected.'

The absence of wax-potting in the original PAFs meant guitarists could easily encounter the dreaded 'squeal' if they got too close to the amp. Duncan sticks to the original blueprint for his 'Seth Lover' model, but now wax-pots many of his other humbuckers. 'The wax potting removes air pockets inside,' says Duncan. 'Air contains oxygen which can cause the pickup to corrode over time.' Seymour also makes all his own parts. 'I think that's one of the things that separates us from the young "kitchen table," boutique pickup winders,' states Duncan. 'Many of them are buying their parts from the big Korean or Chinese guitar parts houses. That's not our style.'

'The PAF sound became good through time and through great musicians... it's an accepted tone' – Tom Holmes

Apart from the wire and magnets that require a foundry to manufacture, Bare Knuckle also make everything on site. 'Butyrate humbucker bobbins, nickel silver baseplates, pole shoes, screws, slugs, maple spacers... you name it, we make it,' enthuses Mills. 'They're all accurate to the original PAF design. I think it's crucial to develop and make your own parts for both consistency and quality of the finished pickup and, most importantly, the sound.'

Close tributes: PAF replicas by Bare Knuckle and Seymour Duncan

Ho Hum

In Seymour Duncan's opinion, part of the 'secret' to the PAF's legendary rep is as much down to the players as it is to Lover himself. 'These were the pickups that helped create the tones on Beck's *Truth* album, Cream, the Allman Bros, early Fleetwood Mac and lots of others. We came to love those tones as being the best.' Holmes agrees: 'I believe the PAF and the quality of Gibsons along with good amp design produced a sound that people got used to,' he adds. 'That sound became good with time, through great musicians... an accepted tone.'

The experts are right. While some want the wild twang of Keith's Tele or the wail of Stevie Ray's Strat, many are searching for the perfect PAF-armed Les Paul. One thing is sure; PAFs set the standard for humbuckers and have played a part in making our lives a whole lot easier,and our guitars a whole lot sweeter-sounding. As for their future? Seymour says it all: 'I think the future for humbuckers is very bright. After all... why deal with hum if you don't have to?'

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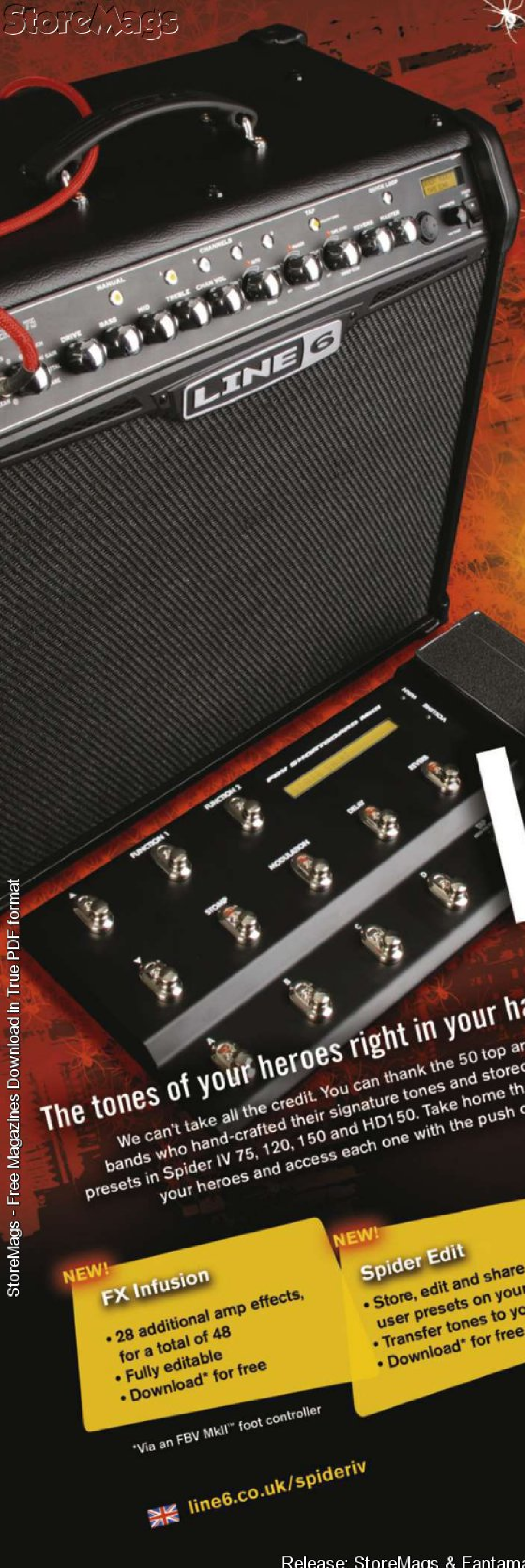

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100 Per Cent Proof

Buddy Guy's new album is no gentle stroll around the park: though this veteran is 74 years old, it's full of swagger, soul and simply ferocious guitar. Michael Heatley catches up with the Chicago dynamo

The blues is the only area of popular music where age can sometimes be an advantage, so Buddy Guy has every right to revel in the veneration he currently enjoys – and his new album *Living Proof* celebrates the fact by kicking off with the song *74 Years Young*. BB King, who guests on the album, may have 11 years' seniority, but Buddy's deep-rooted connections with the Chicago blues scene, the fact he played with Muddy Waters and other Chess label legends and reputedly taught Hendrix much of his showmanship make him the last living link to a vital tradition. Little wonder Clapton called him 'by far and without a doubt the best guitar player alive... he was for me what Elvis was probably like for other people.'

Talking on the phone from Rothschild, Wisconsin, latest stop on an extensive US tour, Buddy started by reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages age and experience bring to a musician.

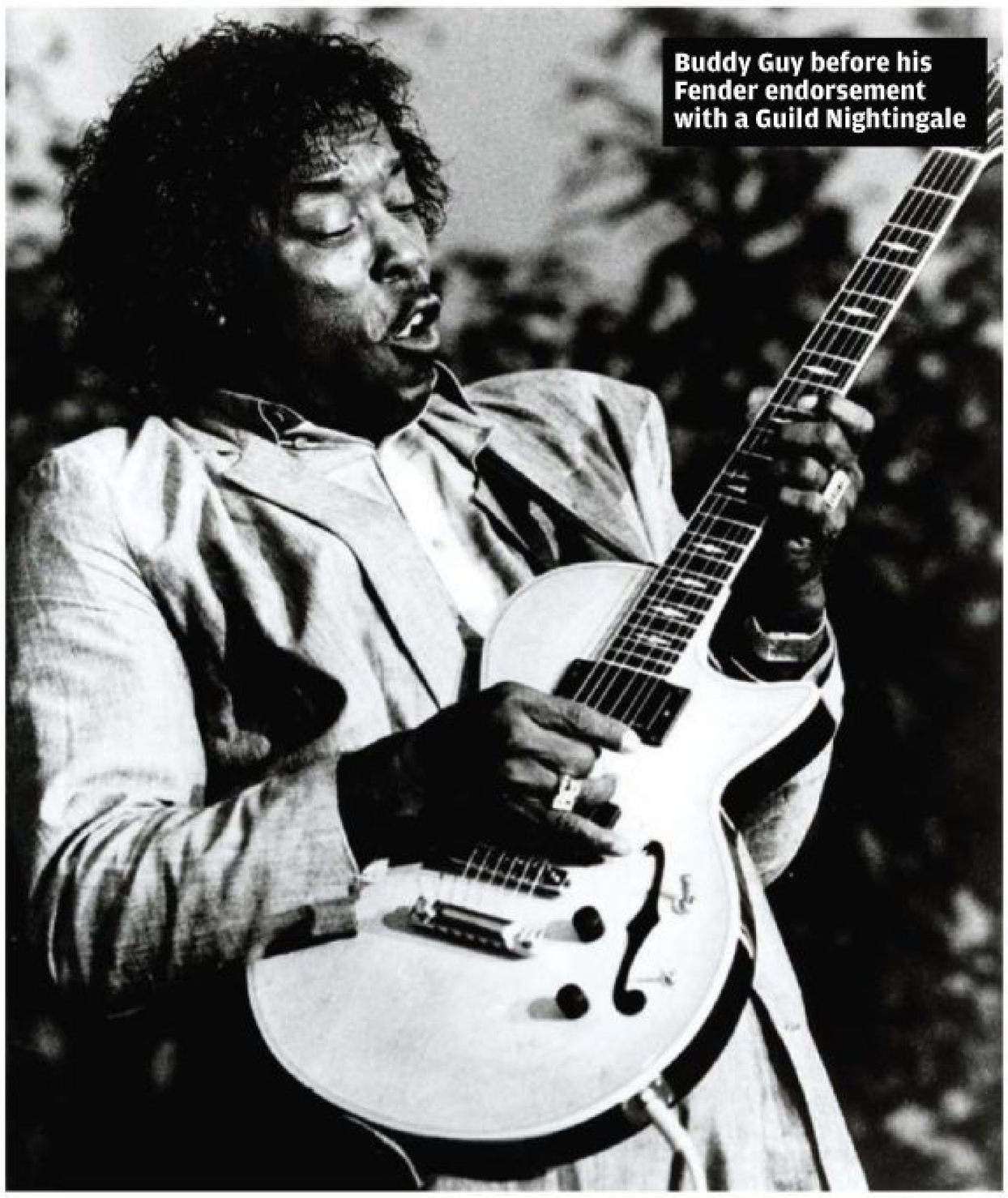
'You don't have the energy you used to,' he points out.' I think I was 26 or 27 when I first came to England. I could jump off the boat into the water and come up without getting wet! Now I can't even reach in and dip a cup of water out without getting wringing wet!

'A lot of people have told me the blues is like whiskey – the longer you leave it in the barrel, the better it gets. I don't know how true that is of a musician. But I do know that with blues musicians it's very seldom you get recognised as a youngster. They wait until you get to a certain age and people say "Yeah, he's a legend." And of course I've been around with some of the greatest that ever did it.'

The song *74 Years Young* was the idea of Buddy's drummer Tom Hambridge, who produced the current album and its predecessor, 2008's *Skin Deep*. He wrote the lyrics based on conversations with Buddy, hence the biographical tone. 'He threw this song at me and I recorded that in March; my birthday was July. It's a few months late, but it hits the spot.'

But don't expect to hear the song played on stage unless it goes down well with the critics: Buddy's not one to waste his time learning tunes unnecessarily. 'I wait and see what the public likes best, then I'll say "Let's play this." Even before the albums, my 45s, I just waited to see if the public were gonna like it. They'll let me know if it's good, then I go from there.'

Something else Guy doesn't do these days is practice. 'I don't know if I should



Buddy Guy before his Fender endorsement with a Guild Nightingale

'A lot of people have told me the blues is like whiskey – the longer you leave it in the barrel, the better it gets'

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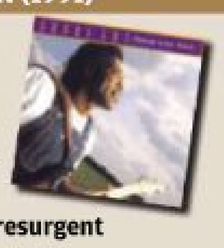
BUDDY GUY
FEELS LIKE RAIN (1991)

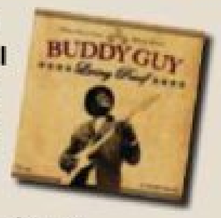


Recorded in London with late Little Feat drummer Richie Hayward, this album rode the resurgent blues wave to perfection

BUDDY GUY
COMPLETE CHESS STUDIO RECORDINGS (1992)

Historic '60s singles such as *First Time I Met The Blues*, *Let Me Love You Baby* and many more. Other fine compilations are available too

BUDDY GUY
LIVING PROOF (2010)



Also available in three-sided vinyl format, Buddy's latest effort has something for everyone. A future Grammy-winner?

Gear

Guitars: Fender Stratocaster, Gibson Les Paul
Amp: Chicago Blues Box
Effects: wah pedal

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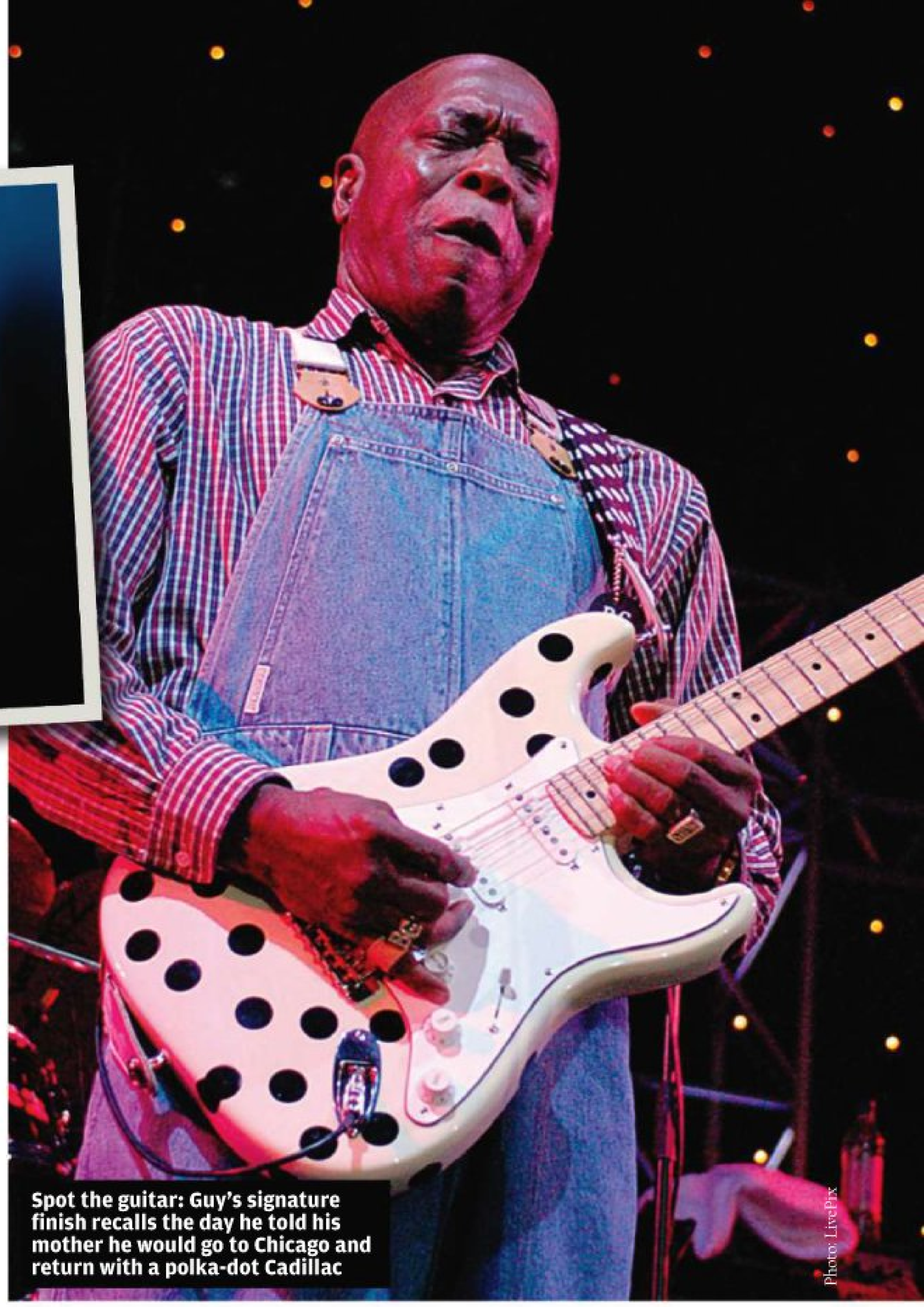
Buddy Guy Interview



Spot the guitar: Guy's signature finish recalls the day he told his mother he would go to Chicago and return with a polka-dot Cadillac

Photo: LivePix

say this,' he laughs, 'but I don't have to pick up the guitar no more. I just listen to a lot of spirituals and a lot of jazz.'

Despite this, he still retains a keen ear. 'I was born on a farm and learned how to play by listening to other people – I never had an instructor or teacher. I copied everything from guitar players like BB King and T-Bone Walker. Without them I don't think you'd be talking to me. If I pick up a guitar, I try to learn something from what I've been listening to. I play by ear, get it in my head and go for it.'

Pressed to name his favourite tracks, Buddy admits he's partial to one he co-wrote, *Let The Door Knob Hit Ya*. 'They made me play that lately,' he admits. '*I Taught Myself How To Play Guitar* [actual title *Thank Me Someday*], that's another, and I love the BB King one [the duet *Stay Around A Little Longer*] – it's a spiritual. My oldest listeners tell me I can sing spiritual better than blues. They've been trying to make me do that for 50 years!'

Buddy agrees that *Skanky*, the peculiarly-titled instrumental that closes the album, has an Otis Rush vibe. And while most of us remember Rush as the man who wrote *All Your Love (I Miss Loving)*, a standout of the *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* album, Guy's connection is more direct. The pair, along with Magic Sam, were labelmates on Cobra in the late '50s and together created Chicago blues' trademark single-note lead guitar style.

In live terms, Buddy would be content to forget his own back catalogue and perform fellow bluesmen's music all night. 'I come out and play a Muddy Waters lick and the music of the people who made blues famous. I like to keep all those guys' music alive, that's what I tell the audience most nights. It was one of the last things Muddy told me. When I called him he didn't even let me know he was sick. I said "I hear you've not been feeling well," and he said "No, man, I'm feeling fine – just make damn sure you don't let the blues die." The next week he was gone. That's why I'm doing this.'

Indeed, Buddy has been forced to record when he'd rather have been on his sickbed. 'When I was doing the sessions, you wouldn't believe how unwell I was feeling. I kept telling my producer we should wait and he said "No, we gotta get you now." I saw him last night and said "I'm glad you kept twisting my arm."'

He has concerns that the blues' exposure in the mass media has diminished since its renaissance in

'I never had a teacher, but if I pick up a guitar I try to learn something. I play by ear, get it in my head and go for it'

A Guy And His Gear

When Buddy Guy hit Chicago in 1957, fresh from his native Louisiana, he admits he was 'as square as a billiard table and just as green.' One change he made was to replace his Gibson with a Strat, his trademark ever since, despite a long dalliance with a Guild Starfire. He used a Strat for most of the new album; 'I had a Les Paul for a couple of tunes to get the right tone,' he adds.

Asked what makes the Strat so good for the blues, he harks back to Eddie 'Guitar Slim' Jones, whose habit of roaming the audience with a long lead Buddy borrowed. 'I saw with a Strat in the days before I could barely afford strings. When I finally had the money for a guitar, I found that you could drop a Stratocaster and it wouldn't break. I couldn't afford a case and, because it wouldn't warp like those acoustic guitars, that made me fall in love with it. Guitar Slim was the wildest player I ever saw. I said "I'm gonna try and play like BB King but act like Guitar Slim."'

As for amplifiers, he's a fan of the Chicago Blues Box. 'The guy who made it tried to get as close to the Fender Bassman as he could – and it comes pretty close. I was using a [Randall] Module in the studio on a couple of cuts. We had three or four amps hooked up to get different tones. They plug me in and if I hear anything good, then cut me loose and let me play!'

Guy's effects begin and end with a wah-wah. 'The first one I saw was used by the late Earl Hooker – that was before Hendrix, and he perfected it so well. But I'm like BB King... I believe in just shaking my left hand!'

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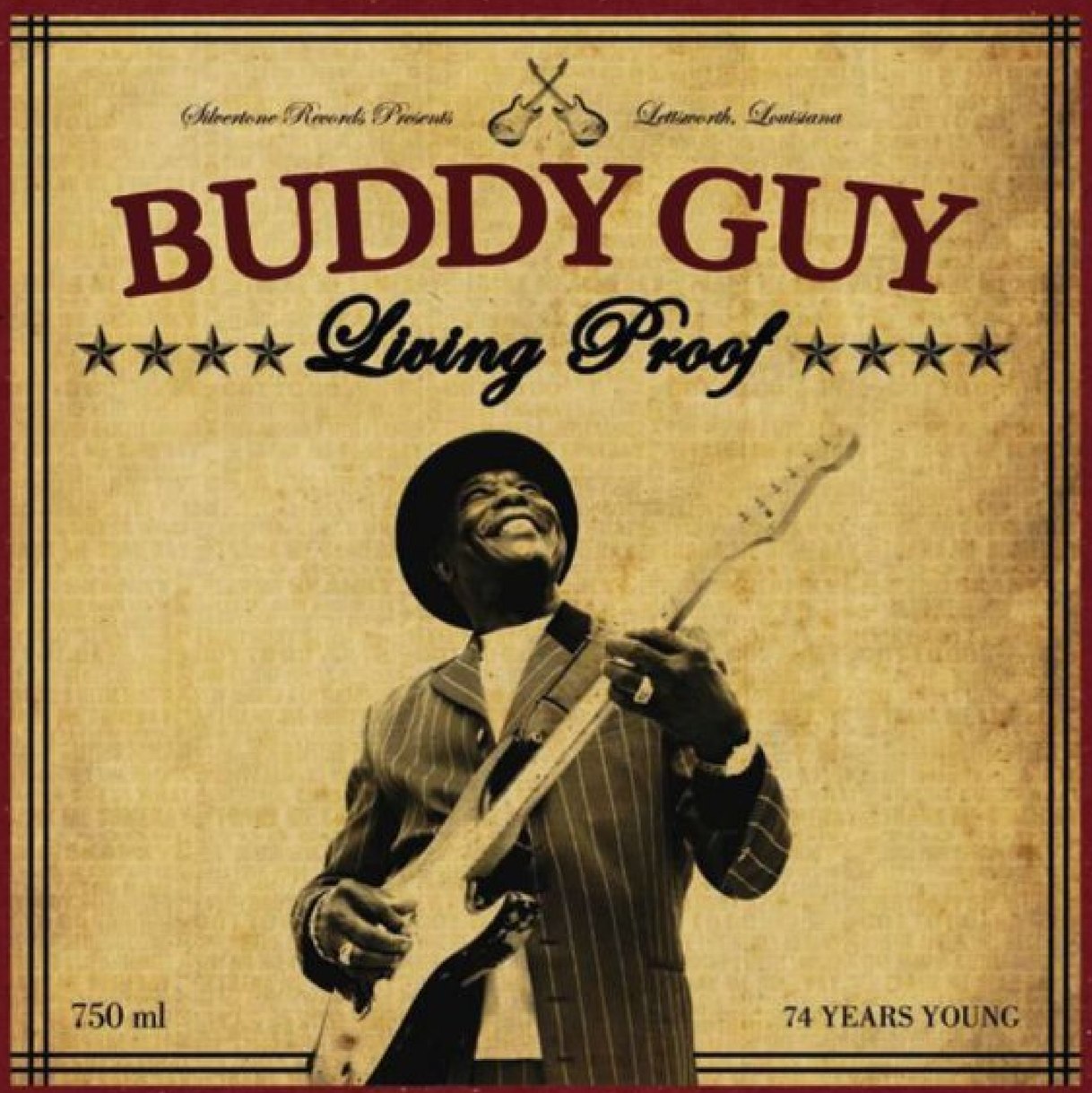

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Buddy Guy, 2010: 'You gotta keep the door open for the blues'

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the early '90s, when John Lee Hooker was charting and Guy cut his 'breakthrough' album *Feels Like Rain*. 'If this record doesn't get heard by some young kid who says "I like that, I'm gonna learn how to play it", then I'm concerned about where the music is going. It's not exposed at the moment on TV that much, and I don't know where it's gonna be shown.

'If you come up with a product – clothing, shoes, a bicycle – if no-one knows about it, nobody's going to get it. You gotta keep the door open for what we're doing. The blues has been there for a while and I'm still trying to work out why they stopped playing it.'

One way Buddy has tried to infiltrate the mainstream media is by including guest stars on albums, following the lead of John Lee Hooker's *The Healer*. Purists have decried the practice, but Clapton and Beck's contributions to *Feels Like Rain* have been followed by others over the years, from Carlos Santana (on the new release's *Where The Blues Begins*) to child guitar prodigy Quinn Sullivan on Guy's previous album. If Jimi Hendrix were alive, would he invite him to appear?

'Of course! How could you say no to someone so creative? I don't know if I taught him much, although people say that. If T-Bone and the others were still around, I would be on the phone saying "Would you come play on my record?"'

The lyrics of *74 Years Young* insist 'there ain't nothing I haven't done.' There may still be the odd ambition unfulfilled, but Buddy Guy is content to go with the flow. 'I dedicated my life to what I love doing so well – playing music. I didn't have a plan. Everything else just happens. I didn't think I would be good enough to be a professional musician. I just wanted to be a guitar player out in the country in Louisiana. I guess I was blessed with the fact that the good Lord sent me in the right direction, around Muddy Waters and those people in Chicago. They asked me to come in and start playing guitar, and I today I wound up talking to you about some CD I got out!'

> *'I dedicated my life to what I love doing so well – playing music. I didn't have a plan. Everything else just happens'*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Muddy Waters once gave the starving Buddy a salami sandwich
- Buddy Guy made an appearance in the 2008 Stones/Scorsese concert movie, Shine A Light
- His own blues club, Buddy Guy's Legends, opened its doors in Chicago in 1989
- Five Grammies currently reside on Buddy Guy's mantelpiece

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Sweet Dreams

The unearthly floating sound of fearless musical explorer Bill Frisell is one of the most distinctive voices in music. Interview: Pete Langman

As fierce, uncompromising and decisive a guitarist as he is a soft-spoken, diplomatic and meandering conversationalist, Bill Frisell is equally comfortable playing 'straight' guitar as he is effects-laden, loop-heavy improvisations. Something of a musical enigma, he is usually lumped into the jazz category despite his regular sorties over the county line into blues, country and even contemporary classical.

His new album, *Beautiful Dreamers*, is, well... Frisell. It isn't a straight-ahead jazz album, and his trio is and isn't a straight-ahead jazz trio; chameleonic guitar stylings wax simultaneously simple and complex in collusion with Eyvind Kang's viola and Rudy Royston's drums. There are shades of Hendrix in the way he quotes a melody, as standards appear and disappear as if they just happened to float through the recording studio at the moment the tunes were recorded, while waves of country and blues wash in and out. It was recorded in just a couple of days, and rehearsed at a mere handful of gigs. 'Whatever is written is a springboard to the hope that something else will happen,' elucidates Frisell. 'We're hoping that every time we play it we're going to find something else in it. We start it in a different way, we get to it in a different way. That's why I never count off a tune or start a tune in any set tempo.'

There are few obvious guitar solos, as Frisell eschews the 'head, chorus, yo, let's blow' arrangements of so many instrumentalists. 'It's a constant conversation. It's very rare we think of one person being the soloist,' he explains in his soft-spoken way. 'When I listen to all my favourite – call it jazz – music... Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Monk... the soloist is just one part of what is really fascinating. It's like looking inside the workings of a clock: you don't look at just one part... well, you can, but the way in which it fits together is what's so amazing. The melody's really important, and it's somewhere in there all the time. It's never going away.'

Bill Frisell, Eyvind Klang, Rudy Royston. Special guest: one large rabbit

'It's a constant conversation. It's rare that we think of one person as being the soloist. It's like the workings of a clock'

This equality is born of Frisell's rather odd band recruitment methods. 'I wasn't thinking about the instruments so much,' he explains. 'That comes later. It's about the atmosphere, the spirit of the person. I'd played with each of them individually, and I knew that Eyvind and Rudy had to meet and would connect – in that way it's about the people but it's also about the music, too.' Frisell doesn't do pre-conception; he prefers to remain open to the moment. 'An opportunity shows up, it looks interesting and I just enter into it.'

In a career spanning several decades, Frisell has acquired one Grammy and several nominations, and collaborated with artists such as Rickie Lee Jones, Elvis Costello and McCoy Tyner. Try to pin him down to a 'typical' Frisell track is difficult. 'I've been recording for over 30 years, and I put my whole life and energy into each album. Also, it's just a moment you capture at that time.' He finally suggests *East/West*, a live album with 'lots of different facets of my playing, older things and newer things and things that we had never even played before,' and the later *History, Mystery*.

Frisell started out on clarinet, and his first guitar was a Fender Mustang, followed by a Jaguar, an instrument he's taken to playing again recently. Though he has a predilection for oddballs like Klein guitars, he's been playing 'some kind of Telecaster' for some time. On *Beautiful Dreamers* he mostly used a custom Tele Thinline made for him by Jay Black, an ex-Fender Custom Shop man. 'It's a Telecaster but with

SO Catalogue

BILL FRISELL
BEAUTIFUL DREAMERS (2010)

BF's 29th album covers everything from Tin Pan Alley chestnuts to originals. As ever, it's both intimate and delicious

BILL FRISELL
EAST/WEST (2004)

A live double album with Victor Krauss, Tony Scherr and Kenny Wolleson. Dynamic and always surprising

BILL FRISELL
NASHVILLE (1997)

Not jazz, not folk, not bluegrass, this warm semi-acoustic outing is a delight. Great cover of Neil Young's *One Of These Days*

Gear

Guitars: Frisell is often seen with a Mexican Thinline Tele or a Jay Black custom version, but he also plays Kleins, Yanuziellos, Andersens, a Fender Jaguar and assorted Strats and Gibson SGs
Amps: Fender Princeton Reverb, Mesa Boogie Subway Blues, vintage Gibson GA18T
Effects: volume pedal, Tube Screamer, Rat, TC compressor, Line 6 delay modeller, Lexicon MPX-100 multi-FX and delays by Boss and Digitech

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Bill Frisell Interview

Frisell with typically un-jazzy 'jazz' guitar, a Fender Jaguar

A Bill Frisell Gear File

Bill Frisell tends to rent or borrow equipment on the road, but he had a Fender Princeton and a handmade Jack Anderson amp close to hand at his recent New York shows. At home, he's particularly fond of a little Gibson amp. 'I think it's an Explorer or something, but it's like a 1x10" combo from 1960, or whatever.' It's actually a Gibson GA18T. 'I just love that amp, it's very simple.'

Effects include a Line 6 delay for looping, a Lexicon MPX-100 multi-FX for reverb and a Tube Screamer for distortion, though he's recently nabbed a Fuzz-Stang, a Sam Ash Fuzz-Stainer reissue. 'It's like this really extreme OTT fuzztone thing made by this guy in Portland, Oregon.

'With the electronics, the effects,' he continues, 'there's kinda this double life. I'm more and more attracted to the natural sound of the guitar, usually the electric guitar plugged straight into the amp, but then there's the electronic stuff. I love the guitar just on its own, just the guitar, but I also love all these other sounds.'

'Every time I hear another guitarist, I feel inadequate. It's an amazing, strange instrument. So many ways of playing it'

a slightly shorter neck and a Gibson scale. Maybe it's not a Telecaster at all, but it looks like one, and it has these DeArmond pickups and a Fender pickup as well.' He also has another nearly-Tele made by Rick Kelly of New York's Carmine Street Guitars. 'He makes them out of old wood he finds or people have given him, really really old pieces, really strange pieces of wood.'

Frisell is in many ways a walking dichotomy. He doesn't do straight lines, and his instinct is to take the path no-one else has spotted. Asked to give examples of his favourite tunes, he immediately picks Bob Dylan's *Hey Mr Tambourine Man*, but forgets who played guitar on the track, so takes a sharp left into Miles Davis' *My Funny Valentine*. Suddenly, he remembers. 'Bruce Langhorne!' he exclaims. 'He just plays these tiny little counter-notes along to the song with Dylan playing the main rhythm guitar, and I realise that was a sort of blueprint for the way that I do so much of what I do. That was somebody that influenced me so much, and I didn't realise it until years later. He was incredible – *is* incredible – but not too many people know about him.'

Frisell is unfailingly modest. 'Every time I hear almost any guitar player, I feel inadequate,' he says. 'They're doing something I can't, that there's no way I'll ever be able to do. It's an amazing, strange instrument in that way... so many ways of playing it and not enough time.'

Unfailingly creative, Frisell seems to move constantly forward, and just as he creates, so he constantly listens. With Charlie Christian, for example, a guitarist he first heard on record 'maybe 40 years ago,' he still hears new things. 'It's like this slow, slow, revealing of how crazy he was, how modern,' he suggests, neatly identifying the heart of his own playing: gentle, crazy, based on the greats of the past yet resolutely of the now.

DID YOU KNOW?

- He only gave up horn and clarinet to concentrate on guitar aged 20
- His breakthrough LP was Have A Little Faith, with covers of Dylan and Madonna
- Frisell loves classic movies and has written music to accompany Buster Keaton films
- You can also hear his distinctive guitar on Gary Larson cartoons

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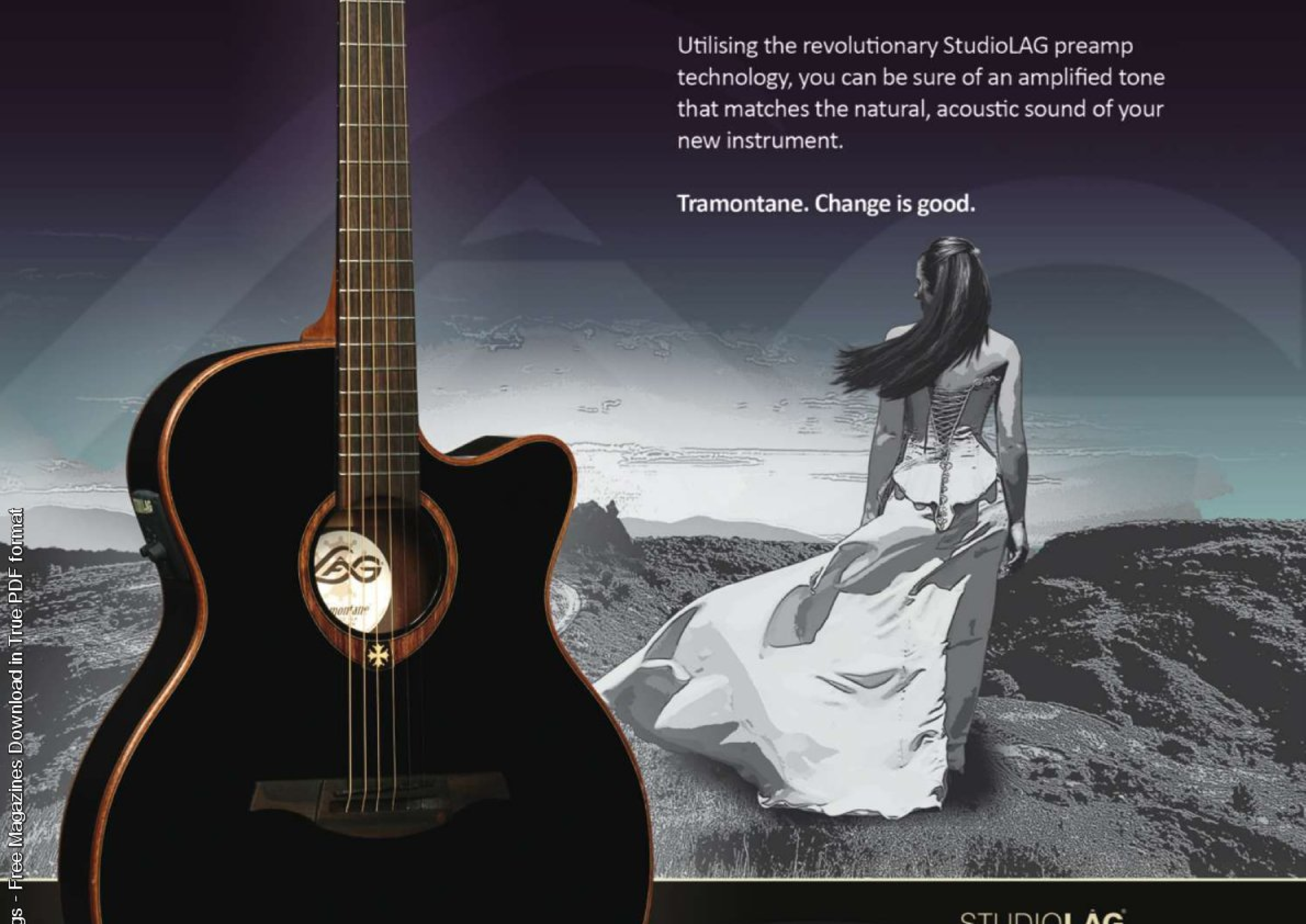

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Tower Of Power

Aynsley Lister knows great blues albums are played, not made, so he and his still-steaming band faced the microphones straight off the back of a European tour. Steve Bailey meets the hardworking guitarist

Aynsley Lister and his weathered red Strat have steadily become pillars of the burgeoning British blues scene, and his hard work on the circuit has earned him a host of ardent fans, all convinced that this explosive homegrown talent is capable of taking on the likes of Joe Bonamassa and John Mayer. A new live album, *Tower Sessions*, captures the guitarist on blistering form – and it's heartwarming to note that the '89 Japanese Strat which features throughout is the very same one that has been with him since he was a 12 year-old guitar-obsessed kid growing up in Nottingham.

'I got my first electric, a Marlin Slammer, when I was 10,' recalls Aynsley. 'I wanted a real Stratocaster so badly, I even scratched off the logo and wrote "Fender" on it with a felt tip pen!'

A trip to buy a case for the Marlin convinced Lister's father that his boy needed a new guitar. 'I was after a Fender case, and the guy in the shop said, "Hang on... this case is worth more than that guitar." He talked my dad into buying the cheapest Strat that said Fender on the headstock, and that's the one I still play.'

The Strat has been refretted, Lindy Fralin Blues Specials have replaced the original 'slightly naff' pickups, and due to constant string breakage Aynsley swapped the saddles and the nut for a graphite GraphTech set. 'It was a very bright guitar, and the graphite has probably softened the treble,' he explains. 'GraphTech nuts and saddles have sort of killed off the other guitars I've tried them on, but with the Strat it just seems to work – and I can't actually remember the last time I broke a string, either.'

In fact, it's all worked so well that Aynsley's never actually got around to acquiring that US Strat he so desperately craved as a youngster. 'I just never really needed to. I know this guitar so well, I can plug into anything and get a good sound.'

What he generally prefers to plug into is his '70s 50W Master Volume Marshall JMP 2104 2x12", one of just 200 made with spring reverb – a must for the Lister sound. 'It's the amp I always come back to. I actually managed to find another original one as a back-up, but for some reason it sounded worlds apart.'

Photo: Bob Thacker

Lister: 'We weren't going for technical perfection. There's a looseness to it'

'I wanted a real Stratocaster so badly, I even scratched the logo off of my Marlin and wrote "Fender" in felt-tip pen'

Puzzled, he took a trip to Marshall. They immediately realised his treasured amp was not as it had left the factory. 'They took a look inside and found that it had the wrong output transformer; they said it looked like it came from a Fender or a Music Man amp. Apparently it's only putting out about 35 watts, and on paper it shouldn't actually work at all.'

Marshall offered to kit out the amp with the correct transformer, but Aynsley declined. 'They said it would make it brighter and more waspy, like a typical Marshall, but I love it as it is. I have the treble and presence almost all the way up, and it sounds really fat and warm.'

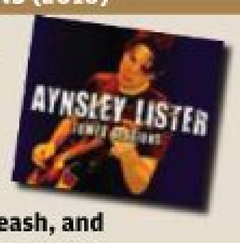
The Marshall's tone is tweaked with a Boss GE-7 graphic EQ that acts like a line driver and which, in Lister's opinion, out-performs many more pricy alternatives. 'The EQ is set flat and I have the level raised by 4 or 5dB, just to push the amp a bit harder and get a little more character out of it. The only other pedals I use are a strobe tuner and a T-Rex Alberta for solos.'

The Strat and Marshall combination covers 90 per cent of the sound on the CD, but cameos are made by a couple of other guitars that are close to Lister's heart. Both were spotted by Aynsley's pal, consummate guitar-hound Rod Thomson.

'Rod is a guitar fanatic. He's always on the lookout. He found the archtop that I use for slide hanging on a junk shop wall. It didn't have a brand name on it and they wanted £60. I said, "It's got no strings! I'll give you £50." Rod put the P90 and the controls on it. The strings are about as low as they'll ever go, and that's still about half an inch high, but it's got a really authentic sound that's brilliant for slide and blues. I play it on the album on *Sugar Low* through my Fender Deluxe Reverb.'

SOL Catalogue

AYNSLEY LISTER TOWER SESSIONS (2010)



The Lister band live with a new dimension. Bringing in keyboards lets Aynsley off the leash, and the 10-minute version of *Purple Rain* is a proper showstopper

AYNSLEY LISTER EQUILIBRIUM (2009)

Aynsley puts his songwriting front and centre with this highly successful stab at the mainstream. Corking slide version of Gnarls Barkley's *Crazy*, too

AYNSLEY LISTER EVERYTHING I NEED (2001)

The breakthrough album was actually his second effort, albeit with six songs recycled from the first low-budget release. Critics raced to dub him 'the new Clapton'

Gear

Guitars: 1989 Japanese Strat, nameless archtop with P90, one-off handbuilt ES-335-style semi-solid, 1967 Gibson ES-345, a 2008 amberburst Les Paul and 1990 black Les Paul Standard
Amps: 1970s Master Volume Marshall JMP 2104 with reverb, Fender Deluxe Reverb and Princeton Reverb
Effects: T-Rex Alberta, Boss GE-7 equalizer

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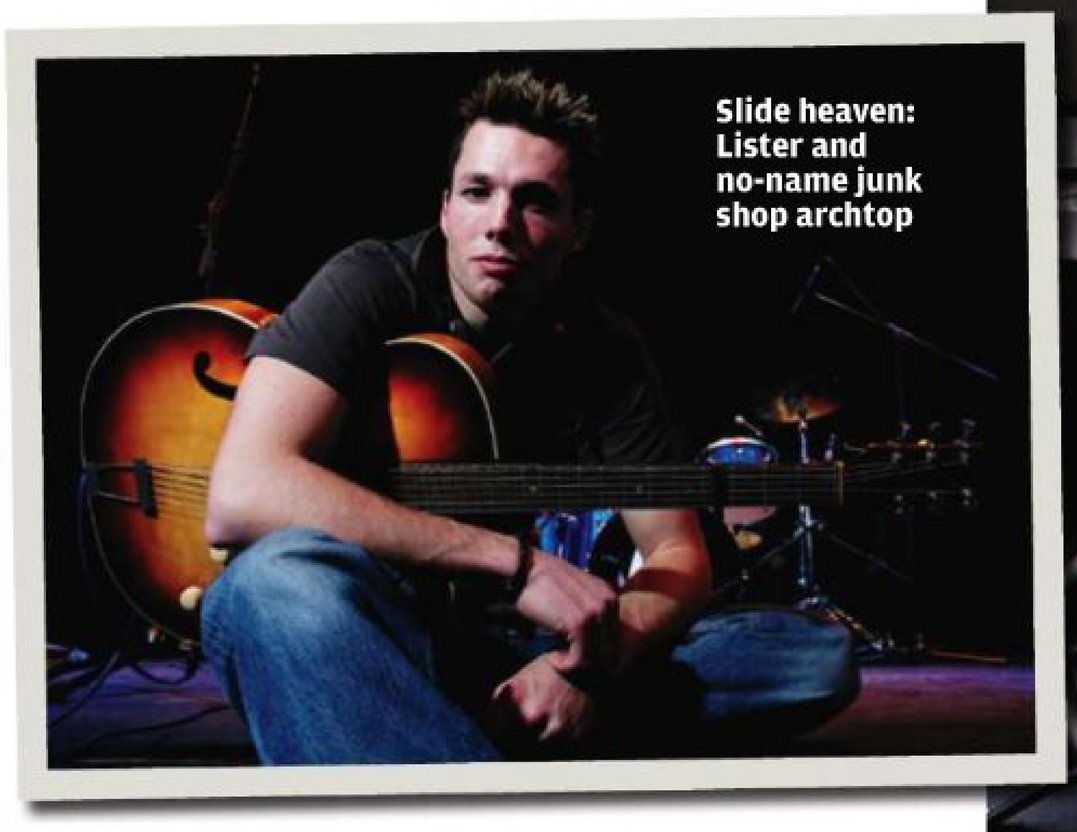
Aynsley Lister Interview



Slide heaven: Lister and no-name junk shop archtop

Aynsley's main guitar is the one he learned to play on – a Japanese Strat from 1989. It's generally twinned with his Marshall JMP combo

Aynsley's other guitar – used on his solo gigs, playing old blues tunes in the John Lee Hooker style – is another unusual find. 'I thought a 335 would be great but I didn't have loads of money at the time, so I asked a few friends who were guitar nuts to keep an eye out for me.'

Once again, Rod came up trumps. He spotted another unbranded guitar, a little the worse for wear, in a shop window in Newark. 'The pots were hanging out, the neck was quite bowed and it was in a really bad way, but you could tell it was solid wood and it was well put together. The guy in the store said it was made at the Newark School of Violin Making in the late '70s as part of a course. It had been through a few different people locally.'

The mysterious semi – possibly the work of a student from the Newark School of Violin Making

The guitar was virtually unplayable, but Rod was convinced it was easily fixable, so the deal was done for just £180. A week later Rod returned it, and Aynsley was staggered. 'It's one of those guitars you can just sit and play for hours. Acoustically, it's really responsive.'

Lister wasn't happy with its DiMarzio Super Distortion pickups but within a couple of months his mate had hit the jackpot again. 'Rod found this guy who had a couple of pickups out of a '65 SG Custom in the loft, and he only wanted £30 each. Now it sounds wonderful.'

He still prefers the violin course special, even though now has a '67 Gibson ES-345. 'The 345 does sound incredible, but the handmade one has got the edge... it's the best 335 I've ever played.' You can hear it in full flow on *Quiet Boy!* from *Tower Sessions*, and when he's out solo he puts it through a 15W Princeton Reverb.

'This guy had couple of pickups from a 1965 SG Custom he had in his loft, and he only wanted £30 each for them!'

Aynsley's just added keyboards to his power trio. 'To start with I was shocked. It made a massive difference to the sound. I think my playing also became a bit more melodic and musical. The whole thing started to breathe a lot more.'

The band had just come off a run of 40 or 50 dates and were on a roll, so Lister decided he wanted to make a permanent document of the live set. There was no time to even organise an audience: they just went into the nearest venue where they knew they could get a good sound – which happened to be the Tower in Winchester – and rattled through the set three or four times. The stand-out track is a 10-minute version of live favourite, Prince's *Purple Rain*.

'Lots of people at the gigs were asking if we had a CD with *Purple Rain* on it, and the answer was no, so that was part of the reason for making this album. When we first added it to the set it only lasted five or six minutes, but the more we expanded it the better it went down. It's not the kind of thing you'd do in the studio... it only works in the live setting. There's no overdubs on it, and none anywhere else on the record at all.

'We did *Purple Rain* in one take. We played the set through once and went off and had a cup of tea, and then we said "Well, what do you think?" We weren't going for technical perfection, and there's a great looseness to it. We captured exactly what you would get at a gig.'

DID YOU KNOW?

- When SRV clones were rife Aynsley put the Strat away and played an LP. It returned after a few years
- Lister signed to blues label Ruf in '98 aged 21. Now on Manhaton, he's sold over 75,000 albums
- Aynsley headlined the Bourbon St Blues stage at Glastonbury 2010
- Tower Sessions was recorded in a converted Victorian watertower

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First Impressions

High-class rockers from a pre-grunge time capsule

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Price: £727

Charvel doesn't do futuristic or faux-'50s, but if you're looking to shred with the crowd at a hip club down on Sunset then they have the tool for the job. Review by Richard Purvis

Charvel

Pro-Mod So-Cal Style 1 HH & Wild Card

Something big happened to rock in the early 1990s. Out went spandex, hairspray and garish album covers; in came tattoos, pierced nostrils and deathly rage. It was a revolution, but nobody told Charvel, who had been on top of the metal world when Eddie Van Halen and Richie Sambora were flashing their superstrats all over MTV. In the aftermath of grunge the guitars' aesthetics stayed pretty much the same, but their reputation for quality did not – a recipe for going out of fashion and staying there.

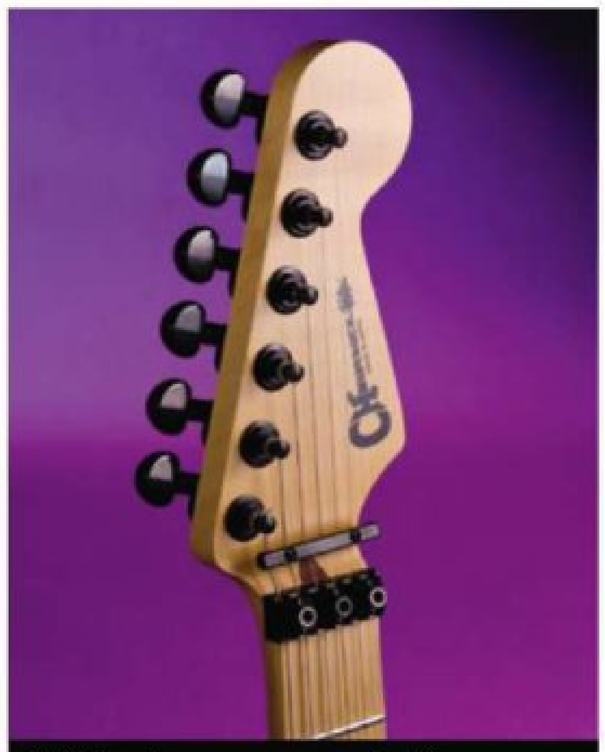
Maybe now we're far enough away from the '80s to look at this sort of bold, high-contrast styling as an acceptable kind of retro. Things have been looking up since Charvel was bought by Fender in 2002, and rumour has it the quality of their current offerings is right up there with the good old days. These two models are from the Japanese-built Pro-Mod series, and they look like serious bits of gear.

SO-CAL STYLE 1 HH

This whiter-than-white Strat-type with maple fretboard, black scratchplate and all-black hardware has a non-pointy headstock, which is a welcome update. The alder body is generously chamfered to accommodate the ageing rocker's beer gut and screwed to a one-piece neck of quartersawn maple – thus extra-strong and stable. The C-shaped neck is not too skinny but it's carved to a compound fretboard radius, moving from 12" to 16" for choke-free bends. The frets are chunky blighters, immaculately dressed. The rolled fretboard edges are supposed to help your fingers glide effortlessly up and down the neck, but as the actual fret ends clearly can't be scalloped they just stick out more between the dips.

Access to the upper frets is as good as can be expected from a trad Fender-type heel design, though the 4mm-thick neck plate doesn't help. The hardware is sound – small Grover tuners, a locking nut and a well-installed Floyd Rose – and the

Nothing wrong with a bolt-on neck, but that neckplate is a chunky item and doesn't help the heel thickness



Nothing keeps wayward strings under control more than clamping 'em down with a twist of an Allen key

Maybe now we're far enough away from the '80s to look at the So-Cal's bold, high-contrast styling as an acceptable kind of retro

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**90%**

Good for... just about anything that needs to be big and loud

Look elsewhere... if you can't get over the hair metal associations

FACTFILE

SO-CAL STYLE 1 HH

Description: Solid body electric guitar. Made in Japan

Price: £727, moulded hard case included

Build: Alder body, one-piece quartersawn maple neck with compound fret radius, Grover tuners, Floyd Rose FRT-02000 bridge, locking nut

Electrics: Two passive DiMarzio humbuckers – Tone Zone (bridge), Evolution (neck); three-way switch, volume control

Left-handers: No

Finishes: Snow white (as reviewed), Ferrari red, black

Scale length: 648mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 18mm
12th fret 20mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 53mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 1.5mm

Weight: 3.5kg/7.7lbs

THE COMPETITION

FENDER
Blacktop Stratocaster HH

Stripped-back stunner from the new Mex-made Blacktop range, with overwound alnico 'buckers and very cool styling

RRP: £539

JACKSON
DK2M Dinky

From the company that owned Charvel throughout their 1980s heyday, this model has Duncan 'buckers and a pointy headstock

RRP: £669

IBANEZ
RGT6EX

Active EMG pickups, neck-through-body construction and a more modern, sculpted profile than the Charvel

RRP: £811

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Electric Review

Price: £821

FACTFILE

WILD CARD

Description: Solid body electric guitar. Made in Japan

Price: £821, moulded hard case included

Build: Alder body, quartersawn maple neck with rosewood fretboard, compound fret radius, Grover tuners, Floyd Rose FRT-02000 bridge, locking nut

Electrics: Three Seymour Duncan pickups: JB humbucker (bridge), STK4M stacked single-coil (middle), STK4N stacked single-coil (neck); five-way switch, volume control

Left-handers: No

Finish: Dead calm aqua

Scale length: 648mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm

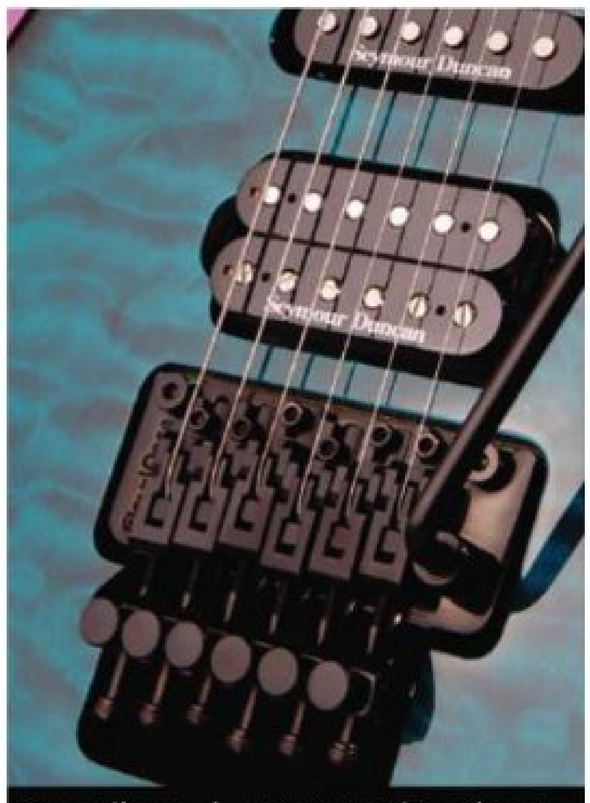
Depth of neck:
First fret 18mm
12th fret 20mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 53mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 1.5mm

Weight: 3.5kg/7.7lbs

Contact: Fender UK
01342 331700
www.charvel.com



From fine quiver to total floppiness, the imported Floyd Rose vibrato does a fine job on both Charvels

The Wild Card's speedy neck gains a fat rosewood fingerboard, while the tuners are black-finished Grovers

The Wild Card's humbucker is articulate and the single coils have a classic Stratty tone. It's more versatile than the So-Cal, but is it as much fun?

passive DiMarzio humbuckers have only a volume pot and a strangely sticky-out three-way switch to get past on their way to the front-recessed jack socket. Tone controls are for wusses, dude.

SOUNDS

The So-Cal's acoustic sound is not exactly zingy but it's full and well balanced. The DiMarzios are dark but there's a surprising amount of snappy, thrappy character, especially on the middle setting – it responds eagerly to aggressive picking and, all in all, sounds a bit like a '72 Thinline Tele. The neck pickup is prone to woolliness on the low E string, but you'll soon forget that when you crank the gain and summon up those old Bon Jovi licks. Sustain is excellent and the honking midrange is polished up perfectly by a strong, sweet pick attack. It doesn't sound like a Thinline Tele now.

The Floyd Rose is Korean-made but seems to behave just as well as a 'real' one. Push right down until the strings flop like overcooked spaghetti, play a 10-minute glockenspiel solo with your other hand, let go and it springs right back into tune. These units are mighty sensitive, mind – the slightest bit of pressure on the top of the bridge can cause queasy upward wobbles, so take care with that right-hand technique.

WILD CARD

Now things get more complicated. The hardware's the same but the Wild Card has a maple top, which should brighten up the sound, and a thick rosewood fretboard, which should soften it again. The pickups are Seymour Duncans in the popular HSS format, so we're expecting less brute force and more harmonic complexity. This is echoed by the bookmatched blue/green top which gives a slightly more sophisticated look. It fades moodily to black around the edges, and the finish is translucent enough on the back to reveal that the alder body is made of three pieces. Again there are no tone controls, which may prove to be more of an issue on a guitar that mixes humbuckers and single-coils.

SOUNDS

Unplugged, the Wild Card is light and smooth in a way that makes the So-Cal sound a tad vulgar. This is carried through by the humbucker, which is more articulate than those white-hot DiMarzios. The single-coils are much lower in output, with a classically Stratty tone that can end up sounding rather weedy through an amp that's been set up for the fat fella at the back. Tone controls might help, but of course that would make the volume drop even bigger. There is more fullness in the out-of-phase sounds (even if 'middle and bridge' is so quacky you'll want to throw it bread), and overdrive will melt things down nicely to the point of tackling blues.

In metal territory the humbucker leaps into life, with the classic honk of the So-Cal toned down for a more grown-up feel. The level drop between pickups is now minimal, but there's enough tonal difference in the five settings to guarantee the switch is going to get plenty of use. It's certainly more versatile than the So-Cal, but is it as much fun? Not quite.

VERDICT

There's no denying that those looks, not to mention the Charvel name itself, will be a big turn-off to anyone who thinks poodle perms look best on poodles, but that's not what the Pro-Mods deserve. They're basically Japanese Strats with high-output humbuckers, and they're pretty good.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	15/20
TOTAL	**87%**

Good for... old-school rock tones with a hint of Fendery sweetness

Look elsewhere... for the full-on raunch of the So-Cal model

THE COMPETITION

FENDER
Standard Strat HSS with Locking Tremolo

For vintage looks and modern sounds, a Mexican Stratocaster with Floyd Rose vibrato and a humbucker at the bridge

RRP: £669

JACKSON
DK2S Dinky

Similar to the Wild Card at first glance, but the neck pickup is actually an active Sustainiac 'driver' controlled by two toggle switches below the bridge

RRP: £786

IBANEZ
JEM555

From the Steve Vai signature range, with three DiMarzios, leafy fretboard inlay and Mr V's familiar 'monkey grip' cut-out

RRP: £1016

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Eternal Guitars

Introducing Eternal Guitars...

Built in Britain using the highest quality components and fitted with the best hardware available, handmade pickups and genuine nitrocellulose lacquer.

"...these guitars look the part, they're set up to perfection and they sound fantastic." 92/100
Guitar & Bass Magazine Jan 2011

www.eternal-guitars.com

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First Impressions

A fine-looking goldtop with vintage pedigree

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Price: £2525

The righteous new P90 version of Yamaha's smooth and time-tested Les Paul challenger is not a low-price option. Is it worth the wedge? Martyn Casserly seeks to find out

Yamaha

SG1802

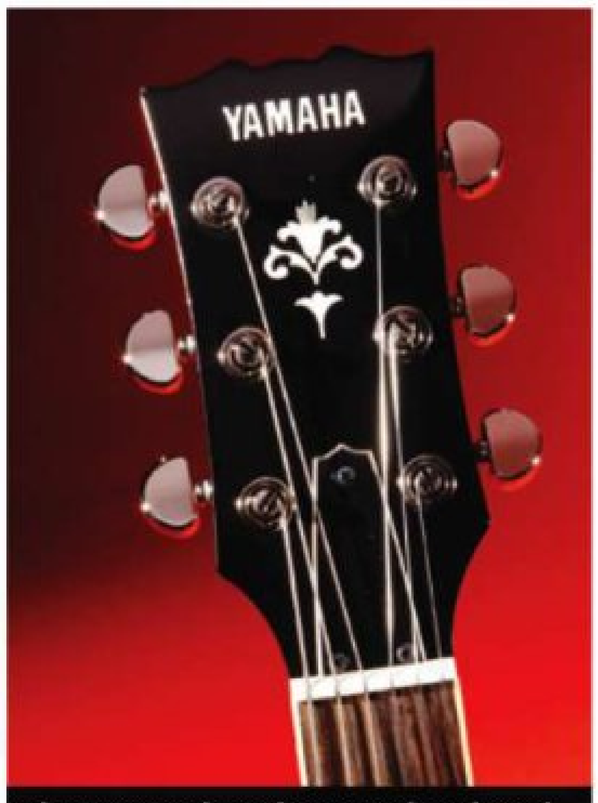
Yamaha is a strange company. For decades they've been making beautiful guitars with professional level build quality and classic sounds at decent prices, but somehow they end up being regarded by many as a budget brand. The success of the Pacifica range is probably a major factor in this, as is the APX line of electro-acoustics that have no doubt passed through most of our hands at one point. There's also the fact that they build pianos, drums, trumpets, all manner of studio equipment and even the occasional motorbike, which only obscures their guitar heritage even further. Delve deeper into the Yamaha catalogue, though, and you'll discover some gems that prove that these Japanese masters know what it takes to build something special.

The Yamaha SG line, which bears a fair resemblance to its Gibson namesake with a twin cutaway pointy-horned look, first emerged in the early '70s. The high-end SG2000 model – designed with input from Carlos Santana – is often cited as the instrument that convinced the western world that Japanese guitars could be just as good as American ones. Now Yamaha has updated the SG range with a few tantalising options that will have wallets quivering... and spouses hefting their rolling pins. Bring it on!

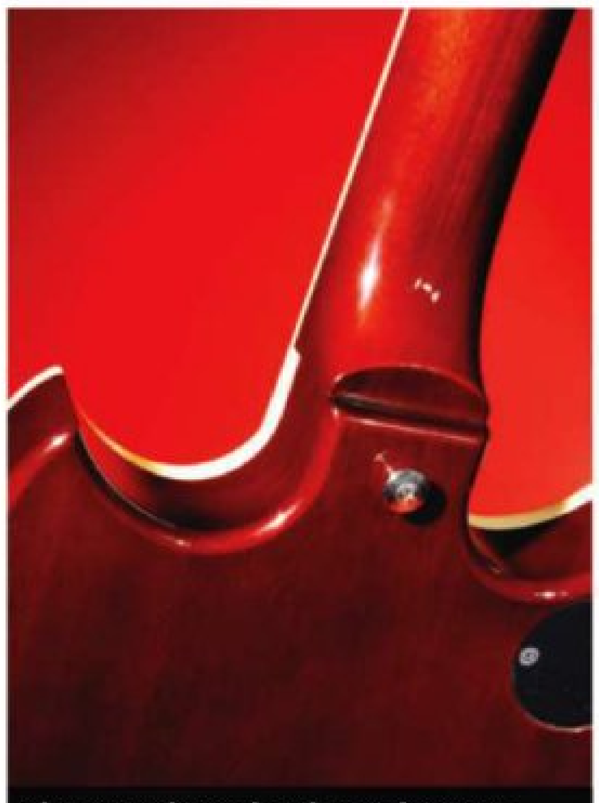
The 1802 is a classic looker. The goldtop finish – accompanied by all-cream P90s, pickguard and binding – evokes images of strangely-dressed men wearing far too much makeup on old editions of *Top Of The Pops*. It also conjures up thoughts of dark, underground clubs that smell of beer, sweat, and cigarettes, with the booming tones of a cracking power-blues trio tearing it up. Quite a first impression.

However, lifting the guitar from the case summons visions of hospital waiting rooms, physiotherapists and the pungent aroma of Deep Heat. Yes – it's bloody heavy. No change there, then, from the originals. The weight is caused by the solid lump of African mahogany from which the body and neck have been hewn. This no doubt contributes towards the girth of tone, aids the sustain and gives the SG a feeling of heft, but if you suffer with your back then you'd be well advised to steer clear of this one... unless you play seated.

A curved maple top completes the combination of woods that you'd expect on a guitar of this type, all of which



The SG1802 has the same headstock inlay as the SG2000 but comes with chrome tuners and no neck binding



The Yamaha's chunky mahogany body has no chambering, making it a hefty 10-plus pounds in weight

With its gold top and cream P90s the 1802 is a classic looker, but lifting it from the case summons the aroma of Deep Heat. It's heavy

FACTFILE

SG1802

Description: Solid-body electric guitar. Made in Japan

Price: £2525

Build: African mahogany body, carved maple top, mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard and 22 frets, Grover locking tuners, TonePros AVRII tune-o-matic style bridge and T1Z tailpiece

Electrics: Two Seymour Duncan SP90-3 pickups, three-way selector switch, twin volume and tone controls

Left-Handers: No

Finish: Goldtop or black

Scale length: 628mm/24.75"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 23mm
12th fret 27mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 51mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 4.6kg/10.25lb

Contact: Yamaha
0844 811 1116
www.yamaha.com

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THE COMPETITION

PRS
25th Anniversary Mira 245 Soapbar

To celebrate their quarter-century PRS has made this special P90 version of the wonderful Mira. It's good

RRP: £1999

MARTYN BOOTH
Special

Another classic from the well-regarded UK luthier. Twin P90s, top quality components, and tone that sings for days

RRP: £1495

GIBSON
SG Special Reissue VOS

Gibson's '60s solidbody gets a Custom Shop model with stunning looks and none-more-vintage sounds

Price: £2199

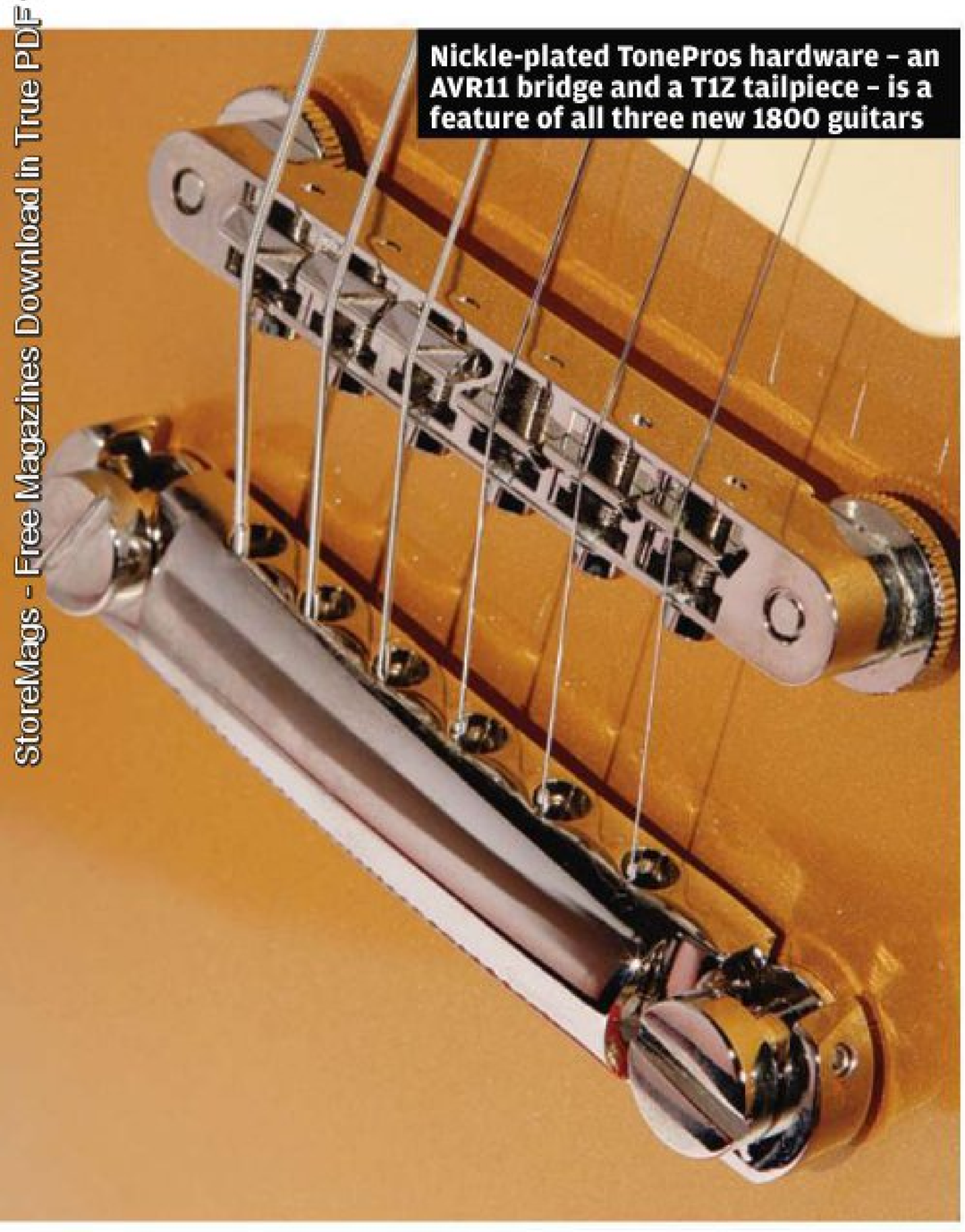
have been assembled in a very impressive fashion. Everywhere you look there's evidence of real attention to detail. Paint edges are neat with no bleeding, the 22 frets are smooth and expertly fitted, even the pearl inlay on the headstock is subtle and elegant. It all adds up to a guitar that is hugely desirable in both look and feel.

Another clue to the high-end nature of the SG1802 is the hardware. The machineheads are Grover locking tuners, the bridge and tailpiece are by TonePros, and the four top hat volume and tone dials feature thick ridges for easy operation, with a very retro font on their labels. Nice!

A quick strum shows that the mass of the body transfers sound well, with a resounding chord which should bode well when we plug it in. It's well balanced on a strap with no noticeable neck-dip, thanks again to the heavy body. Overall, the 1802 is a wonderful guitar to play; there's no struggling to push tight bends, which could ruin your vibrato. This guitar offers an excellent amount of tension and space for your fingers to work.

SOUNDS

Plugging the SG1802 into a Laney VC15 on the clean channel gives us a lovely, lush sound from the neck pickup. Rolling off the tone to almost nothing achieves a decent jazz-style smooth sound that works well with fingerpicked movable chords. Turn the dial a little and the famous P90 bite begins to come into play, perfect for occasional stinging lead flicks.



Nickle-plated TonePros hardware – an AVR11 bridge and a T1Z tailpiece – is a feature of all three new 1800 guitars

The Seymour Duncan SP90-3 pickups measure 12k and 14.61k and have two large ceramic magnets for extra output

Switch to the bridge and hit it hard: instant Who. More gain? It's Brian May. Flick to the neck and widdle away? You're in Santana country

A bit more fiddling brings up an excellent Gilmour *Another Brick in the Wall* lead tone with subtle touches of depth and shimmer. Mixing the two Seymour Duncans together adds attack to the midrange, which can be used to great effect through careful use of dynamics. The bridge is thinner but never weedy; '60s-style pop sounds a treat when played with a bit of reverb, and classic blues is only a string bend away.

As the overdrive increases the P90s begin to occupy their preferred territory with that wonderful gnarly roar. Switch to the bridge, swing the plectrum hard, and bam! Instant Who. More gain? Brian May. Flick to the neck and widdle away? You're in Santana country. Such is the versatile nature and balance of the pickups that selecting the right option becomes a far more important factor in your playing. You might start off with the bridge full open for rhythm, then switch to the neck for a soulful lead, back to the bridge for a more aggressive run, then into the middle for a brighter rhythm. This musicality raises the SG1802 over your garden variety guitar and turns it into an instrument that allows you to really express yourself.

VERDICT

The superb SG1802 will put a smile on the face of anyone with a leaning towards a vintage-flavoured sound. The playability is effortless but keeps you on your toes, and the styling is gorgeous. The only downfall is the weight – and the price, but this is a pro instrument built by craftsmen who care about what they're doing. P90s aren't to everyone's taste, but if you can deal with a little hum you'll discover that there's something very satisfying about playing a P90 guitar. In a world awash with Les Pauls, Strats and Teles (as nice as that is) sometimes being a little different can go a long, long way... especially if it's an instrument as well built as this.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**91%**

Good for... **posh sounds with a vintage edge**
Look elsewhere... **if your back is a bit tender**

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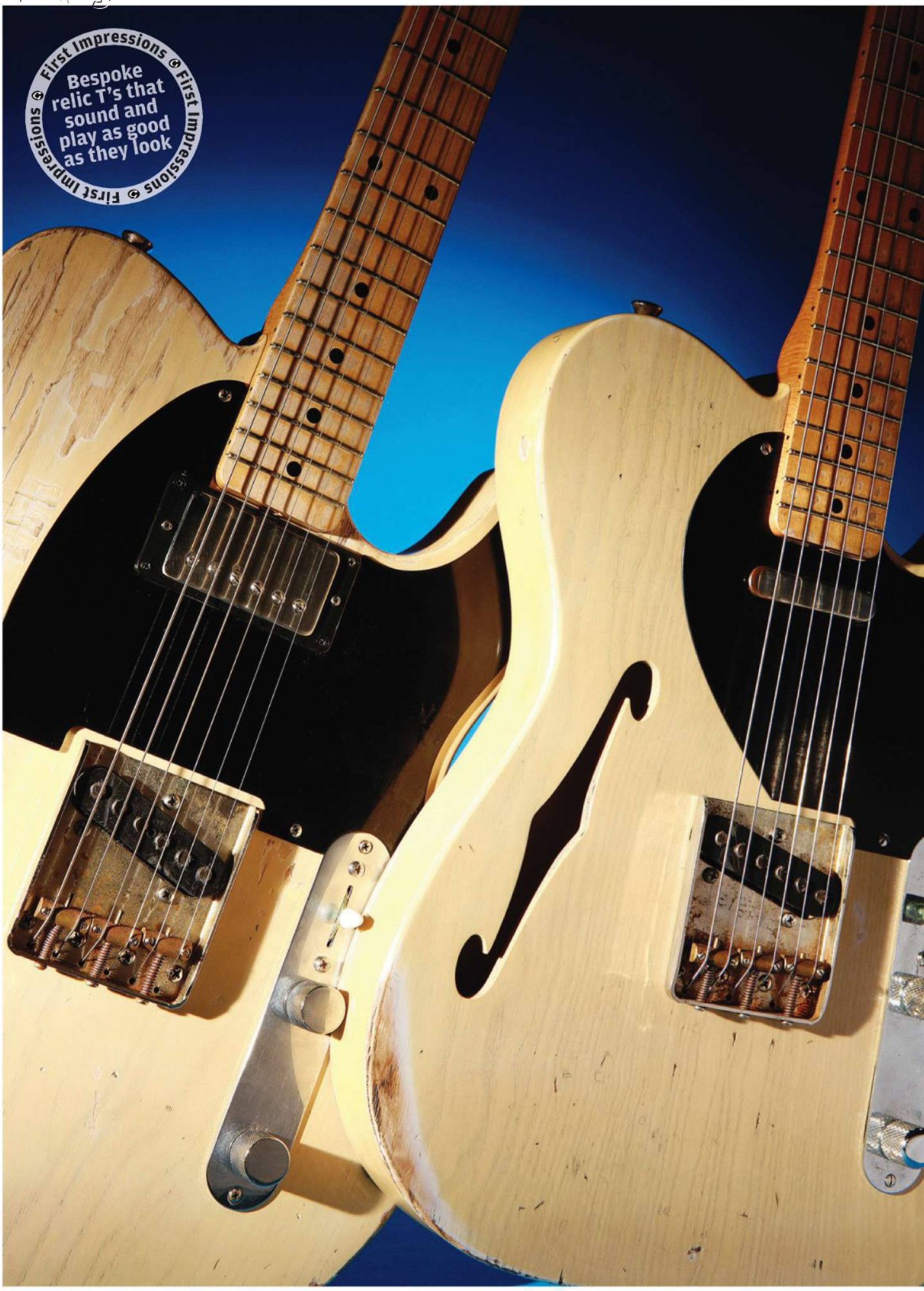

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Price: £1500

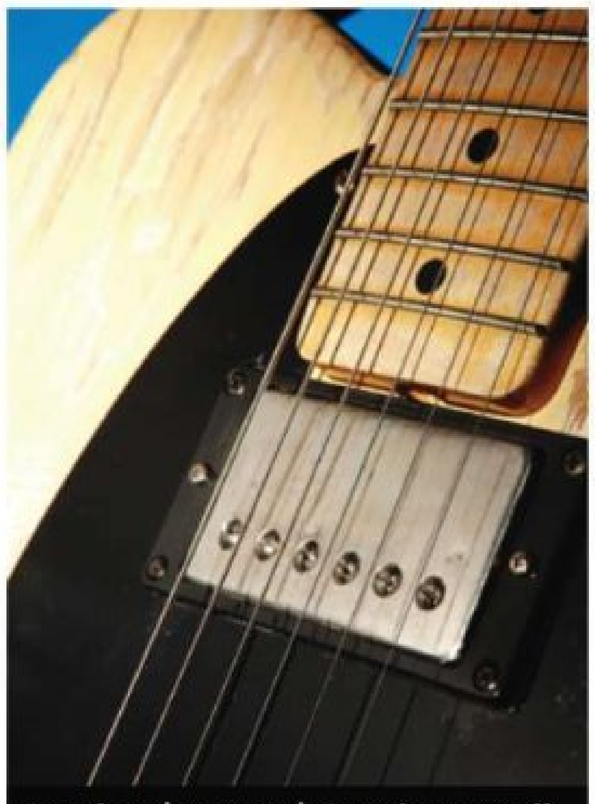
Warning: the following review contains aged guitars. If you don't like 'em, move along – but if you're partial to the odd dirty blonde, says Huw Price, then please read on

Eternal

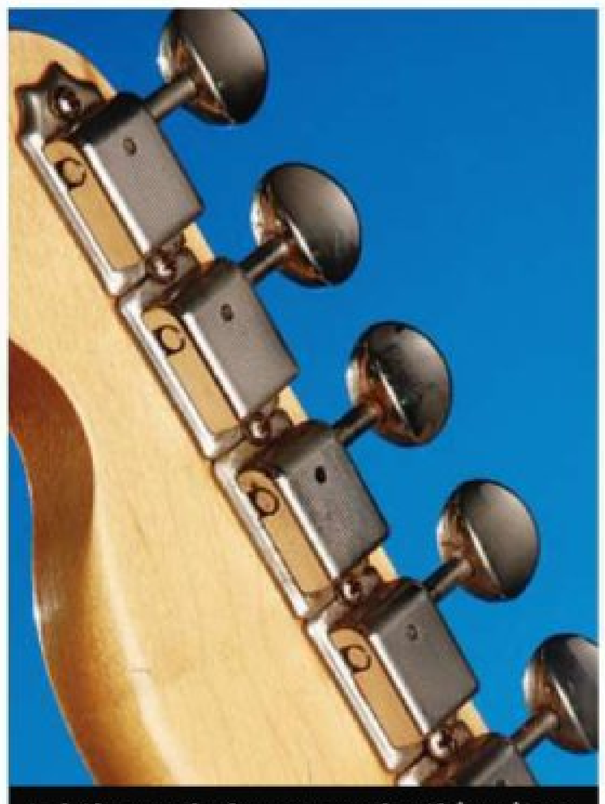
Micawber & Hollow Blonde

After a long stint as a builder and repairer in London's Denmark Street and the occasional writing gig for *Guitar & Bass*, Dave Walsh relocated to the south coast and established Eternal Guitars. The bodies and necks are mostly sourced from Allparts but Dave re-contours the bodies and refines the neck profiles for comfort and vintage accuracy. Aficionados will notice the absence of a router hump, the mish-mash of flat and cross-head screws and so forth, but Dave says he's more concerned with capturing the spirit than vintage correctness.

The hardware comes from Gotoh and Kluson, nuts are cut from bone and the finishes are nitrocellulose. Dave has the pickups made to his own specs in the UK. The bridge pickups have slightly oversized Alnico 5 poles and are handwound with 43 gauge wire to give 'a depth and grunt often lacking in more common pickups.' The neck pickups also have 43 gauge coils with Alnico 5 slugs, and they can be aged to the customer's specifications.



Crowbarring PAFs into Teles was all the rage in the '70s, and with the right pickup it can still work today



Subtly aged Klusons and a thin nitro finish all contribute to an authentic feel that isn't trying too hard

Bodies and necks are mostly from Allparts, but Dave recontours the bodies and refines the neck profiles for comfort and vintage accuracy

MICAWBER

No prizes for guessing whose favourite '53 Tele inspired this one. Ours has a regular six-string bridge rather than a five-saddle brass toploader, but you can specify a 'Keith bridge' along with Sperzel tuners. The blonde finish looks great; there's no 'definitive' shade, since you'll never find two heavily-used 60-year old Teles that look the same. Replicating wear on a maple board is tricky. Dave has pulled it off; the colour looks authentic, being faded rather than filthy. The stock flat top knobs are a nice touch, but the Strat-style switch tip looks too white and new.

Like many Tele players in the early '70s Richards installed a humbucker in the neck position. This involved cutting a chunk out of the pickguard, and Dave has accurately recreated this feature. Keith's PAF was lifted from a '50s Gibson, and Eternal's unit has been left unpotted.

FACTFILE

MICAWBER

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in the UK

Price: £1500 with tweed case

Build: Swamp ash body with bolt-on one-piece maple neck, 21 Jescar 50078 frets, 9.5" radius board, steel bridge, brass saddles, Kluson tuners

Electrics: Vintage-spec Eternal single coil at bridge with Eternal PAF-style neck humbucker, master volume and tone controls with three-way pickup selector

Left-handers: Yes

Finish: Nitrocellulose, colours as requested

Scale Length: 648mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 24mm
12th fret 24mm

String spacing:
Nut 34mm
Bridge 54mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 3.75kg/8.25lbs

Contact: Dave Walsh
07970 245818
www.eternal-guitars.com

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	17/20
Playability	20/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	**91%**

Good for... punk, indie, blues, rock, slide, country, funk

Look elsewhere... death metal, shredding

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Electric Review

Price: £1500

FACTFILE

HOLLOW BLONDE

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in the UK

Price: £1500 with tweed case

Build: Chambered swamp ash body with bolt-on one-piece maple neck, 21 Jescar 50078 frets, 9.5" radius board, steel bridge with brass saddles, Kluson tuners

Electrics: Two vintage-spec Eternal pickups, master volume and tone controls with three-way pickup selector

Left-handers: Yes

Finish: Nitrocellulose – colours as requested

Scale Length: 636mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 23mm
12th fret 24mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 54mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 3.25kg/7.15lbs

Contact: Dave Walsh
07970 245818
www.eternal-guitars.com

THE COMPETITION

FENDER
52 HEAVY RELIC TELE BB

This 'Team Built' Custom Shop Tele has a blonde ash body, a large '50s-style C shaped neck, Abigail Ybarra handwired pickups, Dunlop 6105 frets and a black pickguard. It's the real deal, if you can afford it

RRP: £3599

DEARNALEY
Taff Delta

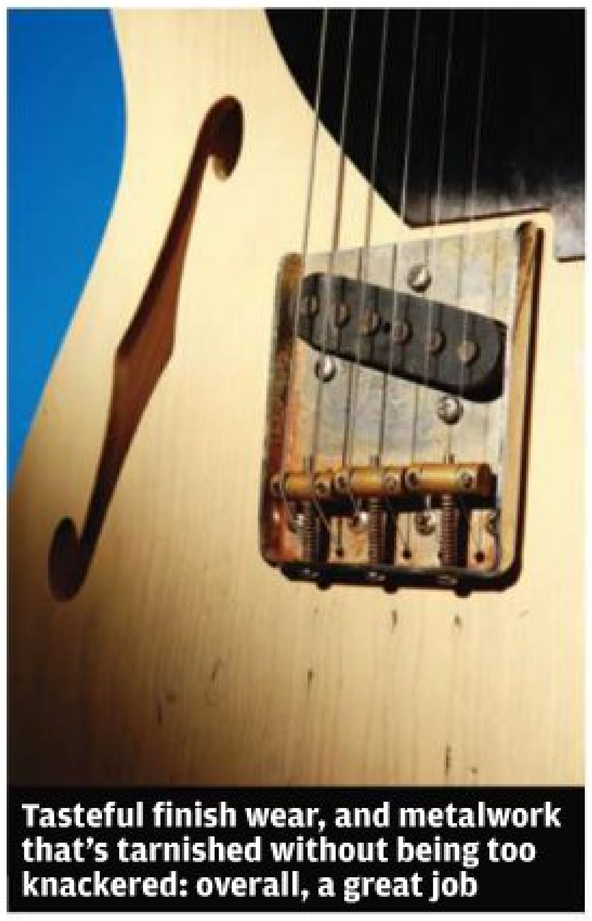
Our reviewer was so impressed with the Dearnaley Taff Delta blackguard replica that he bought it. In the intervening five years Dearnaley's skills have developed and he's now one of the best in the biz

RRP: £1600

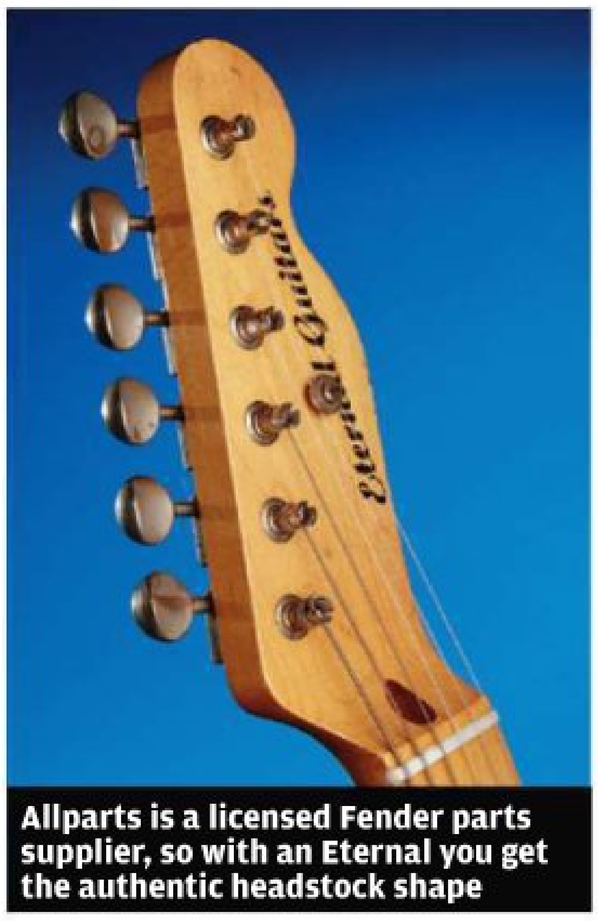
NASH
Timewarp Series T-50

We have read great reports about Nash replicas but the two we reviewed looked pretty horrendous. However, the wood and the Lollars do combine to deliver some great tones

RRP: £1349



Tasteful finish wear, and metalwork that's tarnished without being too knackered: overall, a great job



Allparts is a licensed Fender parts supplier, so with an Eternal you get the authentic headstock shape

Both guitars are very resonant, but the Hollow Blonde is louder and brighter while the Micawber is thicker in the mids and more substantial

HOLLOW BLONDE

A Thinline body, mixed up with early '50s features? Yes – and somehow it all makes perfect sense. The 'wear' factor is restrained; the Klusons look very good and the pickguard is gracefully worn rather than trashed. This is a 'medium' relic with clearly visible body wear, and the transition from darker outer layers to the lighter coats is smooth and natural. Perhaps the grunge applied to the exposed wood is a little heavy-handed, but the lacquer checking is subtle. On the Hollow Blonde it's mostly on the rear, and there's none on the Micawber.

Both guitars have massive rounded necks. These types of necks can feel daunting, but often after the first 10 seconds you forget all about them and many players think they add focus, clarity and sustain to T-type guitars. Dave gets a great roll-over at the edge of the fingerboard and although there's very little finish on the back of the necks, they feel smooth and played in.

SOUNDS

Acoustically, the f-hole makes a big difference. Both guitars are very resonant, but the Hollow Blonde is louder and brighter while Micawber is thicker in the midrange and more substantial (strangely, these attributes are somewhat reversed through an amp).

On their bridge pickups the Eternals are T to the max with all the wiry snap, bite and edge you could hope for. The Hollow Blonde is a touch meatier and richer in harmonics, but both have a chiming, woody sprang that's perfect for country, funk and blues. The Hollow Blonde closely conforms to what you'd expect: the neck pickup has an expressive vocal quality with softened highs that works surprisingly well for jazz, and the in-between setting gives you all the cluck you could ever need for Travis and chicken pickin'.

With its louder, thicker, warmer neck pickup the Micawber has a split personality. With a little treble roll-off its resemblance to an LP is quite remarkable. Although the neck setting isn't my favourite for clean, it's blistering for overdriven soloing. The in-between position is also a winner, with less cluck and more balls than a stock T-type.

Considering that Leo Fender devised guitars like these for country and western swing, I'm always struck by their sheer wildness through cranked amps or overdrive pedals. It's not as if the pickups are especially hot or beefy, but these guitars possess real power along with remarkably dynamic responsiveness.

VERDICT

Even if you don't appreciate relics, they can be practical and fun. You get that old guitar feel at an affordable price without the inconveniences of vintage-style fingerboard radii and skinny worn-out frets; if you dent them it doesn't matter, you can mod them without destroying their value, and you don't have the worry of taking an ultra-valuable collector's item to gigs. Better still, if you're ordering from a custom builder like Dave Walsh, you can allow your imagination free rein and come up with mods, pickup combinations and colour schemes that never appeared in anybody's catalogue. That's what Dave is doing, and he's doing it with great success: these guitars look the part, they're set up to perfection and they sound fantastic.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	20/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	**92%**

Good for... **punk, indie, blues, rock, slide, country, funk**

Look elsewhere... **death metal, shredding**

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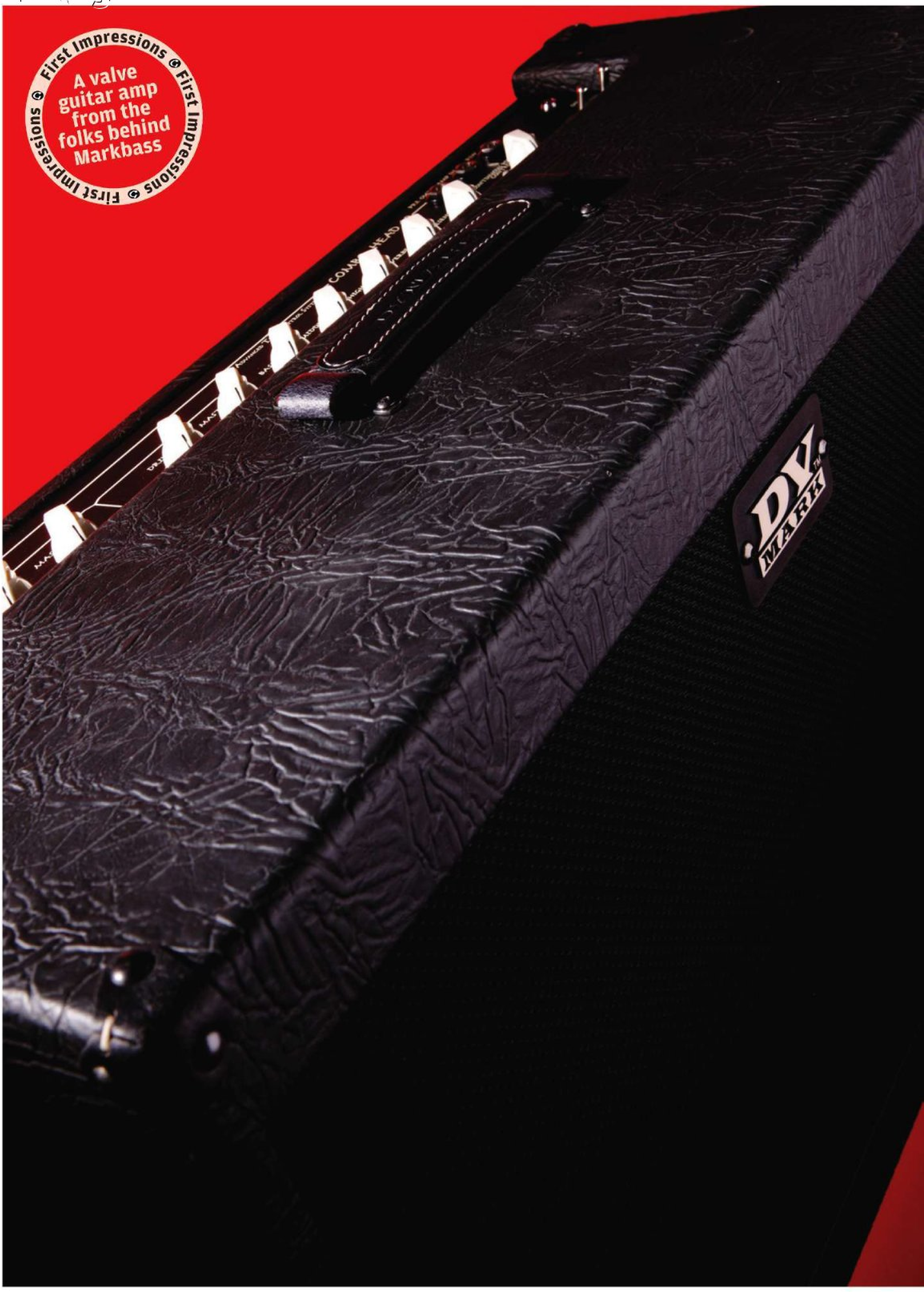
First Impressions

A valve guitar amp from the folks behind Markbass



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Price: £1399

Don't look to this unusual Italian-made boutique amplifier for loud, shimmering cleans: it's all about rainbow shades of dirt at almost any volume you like. Review by Will Nicholas

DV Mark

DV40 212 Combo

Marco De Virgiliis' Markbass company has established quite a reputation among bassists – and acoustic players too. This combo comes from DV Mark's new line of all-valve guitar amps, inspired by Virgiliis' friendship and collaboration with the late Hiram Bullock.

The DV40 212 contains two DV Mark Custom 12" B&C neo speakers with 300W power handling. This is plenty, because the DV40 is rated at 40W, with a pair of EL34s fed by an ECC83 splitter handling power amp duties. In the front end are two ECC83s. Since these are all double triodes, Channel 1 passes through three amplification stages and the fourth triode stage is added to the signal path post-EQ, when Ch2 is selected. Although the channels share the same passive tone controls – Bass, Middle, High and Presence – Ch1 has its own Gain and Master controls while Ch2 has Drive and Master.

The two inputs are labelled Hi Z and Low Z. Hi Z is for guitars with regular passive pickups; guitars with high output active pickups should be connected to Low Z, with its 6dB pad to maintain clean headroom. A Norm/Bright switch: boosts upper treble frequencies for added sparkle or compensates for any perceived loss of brightness at low volume levels.

The Pre Out and Amp In sockets are for the effects loop, with preset operating levels to match most line-level FX. The FSW socket connects the DV40's dual footswitch; this provides easy channel switching, and activates a 6dB boost for Solo mode along with an accompanying red LED. Unfortunately, there are no LEDs on the footswitch itself.

The amp section with all the valves and transformers is located at the bottom of the cab and the control section is connected to the power amp by a long ribbon strip of wires. This separation of the controls and amp is something you might associate with very early valve guitar amps. A panel at the rear provides three speaker connections labelled 4, 8 and 16 Ohms, and the Tube Mode switch enables the DV40 to operate in Pentode or Triode mode. Triode mode drops the power from 40W to 15W, so you can choose between maximum clean headroom and volume or quicker power amp breakup for earlier cranked up tone at gigs.

The DV40 has a very good tone, somewhere between an old 50W Marshall and a blackface Fender

A Bias switch toggles the DV40 between High and Low Bias. For best power, fidelity and tone quality the manual recommends you use High Bias, but if you want to reduce your electricity bill and prolong the life of the valves when noodling at home, then try Low Bias.

The rear panel has a Service connection that looks like an Ethernet socket. This is DV Mark's ATCS (Advanced Tube Control System) interface, allowing users or techs to connect this port to a PC/Mac. Once the software and interface become available, bias current, anode and power supply voltages and other data may be collected for DIY diagnostics.

In addition to Master Volume controls on both channels and Pentode/Triode

The Continuous Power Control scales the output from a spanking 40W to a recording-friendly single watt or less

FACTFILE

DV40 212

Specs: 40W/15W 2x12" combo with three 12AX7 and two EL34 tubes, FX loop. Made in Italy

Controls: Switches – Bright/Norm, Ch1/Ch2, Tube Mode, Bias, Standby, On/Off. Controls – Gain, Master (Ch1), Drive, Master (Ch2), Bass, Middle, High, Reverbero (sic), Presence, Continuous Power Control

Price: £1399

Contact: Proel International 020 8761 9911 www.dvmark.it

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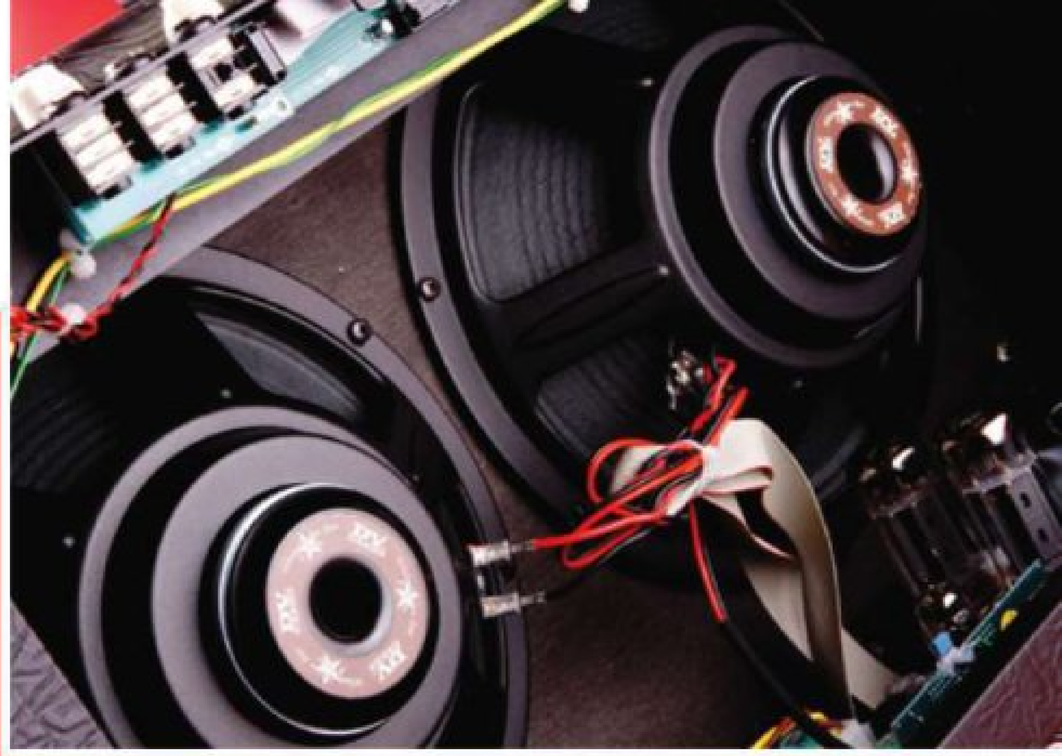

The DV Mark's unusual layout is spotlighted by internal orange LEDs

THE COMPETITION

MESA BOOGIE
Express 5:50

USA-built Class A/B 50W or Class A 5W 1x12" two-channel four-mode combo with reverb, buffered effects loop and three button footswitch

RRP: £1561

FRYETTE
MEMPHIS THIRTY

Switchable 30W/18W 1x12" Class A combo with four EL84s, Clean & Drive channels, switchable voicing, footswitchable boost, FX Loop serial/ parallel. Two-button footswitch included

RRP: £1350

FENDER
SUPER-SONIC 112

60W 1x12" combo in blonde or black, two channels, bypassable FX loop, preamp out, power amp in, includes three-button footswitch and cover. Classic 1960s Fender sounds plus high gain and crunch

RRP: £1244

switching, the DV40 has another level management feature – CPC or Continuous Power Control. In Pentode mode this ramps the power down from 40W Class AB to 1W Class A, and in Triode mode it drops from 15W Class AB to 1/2W Class A. DV Mark has a patent pending on this feature, but it seems not unlike the power scaling we've seen on 65 and Lazy J amps.

SOUNDS

Switch on, and once the red power LED has stopped flashing you can flip the Standby. There's an impressive light show inside the cabinet, with orange LEDs that make the valves look as if they're smouldering.

Calling Ch1 'clean' isn't quite accurate: it has more clean headroom than Ch2, but we've played a fair few 40W amps with more clean headroom than this. With Master maxed, things stay clean with Gain below the second marker so long as you're using vintage-spec F-type single coils.

The tone is thick and juicy with a touch of compression that greatly enhances the playing experience. The reverb integrates well, from a subtle hint to a full-blown wash. Although the EQ controls are effective, the DV40's inherent tone is always apparent. It's a very good tone, somewhere between an old 50W Marshall and a blackface Fender... extremely clear without being edgy or bright, and the characters of all our usual test guitars shone through with lovely singing sustain.

In reality this isn't a two-channel amp – it's a one-channel amp with an extra valve gain stage that you can switch in and out. Since the EQ and the signal path remain much the same we weren't expecting a Jekyll and Hyde personality, but there's a shift in frequency response that might have something to do with the way the extra valve stage is configured. The upper mids are brought forward, giving Ch2 a more aggressive rock voice with more bite but less bass and low mids. There's no clean headroom at all, and the Gain control quickly pushes Ch2 into heavy overdrive then crunch.

In reality this isn't a two-channel amp – it's a single-channel amp with an extra valve gain stage you can switch in and out

The shared EQ means that compromise might be required if you like bright clean tones but dark, smooth overdrive. The tonal differences between the channels is less apparent when the continuous power control is used. This contains the level without changing the tone or, more importantly, the dynamic feel – so it's quite different from a master volume.

VERDICT

This amp has a great sound and is very enjoyable to play, but the effect of some of its features is so subtle, you might think them barely worth having. The contrast between the harder and punchier pentode setting and the browner triode setting is noticeable and useful, but the Bias switch is a bit superfluous; solo mode is a bit underwhelming; and we'll have to reserve judgment on the Service port. On balance, having the Norm/Bright switch active on Channel 1 alone might have made it easier to optimise the tone for both channels. We like the leather handle and corner protectors; time will tell if they're up to the job. The DV40 certainly sounds like the expensive amplifier that it is, but it isn't especially versatile and it somehow doesn't inspire quite the same degree of confidence as some other amplifiers in its price range.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	16/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	14/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	80%

Good for... juicy, valvey, tactile tone

Look elsewhere... for versatility, precise tone shaping, loud clean sounds

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Jesse Hughes
Eagles Of Death Metal

Simon Neil
Biffy Clyro

Dan Hoerner
Sunny Day Real Estate

Dave Catching
Eagles Of Death Metal

MOFO

ONE HOT MOTHA

From spanking clean tones through rich and responsive crunch to full-blown high-gain mayhem, the Hayden MoFo does it all. Visit the new Hayden MoFo website and discover the all-valve 30-Watt guitar amp head that Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil describes as 'a real mother******.

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First Impressions

A rocking valve combo better suited to recording than gigs

Egnater

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Price: £529

Most low-wattage all-valve amps are one-sound wonders, but Egnater's new baby combo sets out the rewrite the rulebook with options galore. Review by Huw Price

Egnater
Tweaker

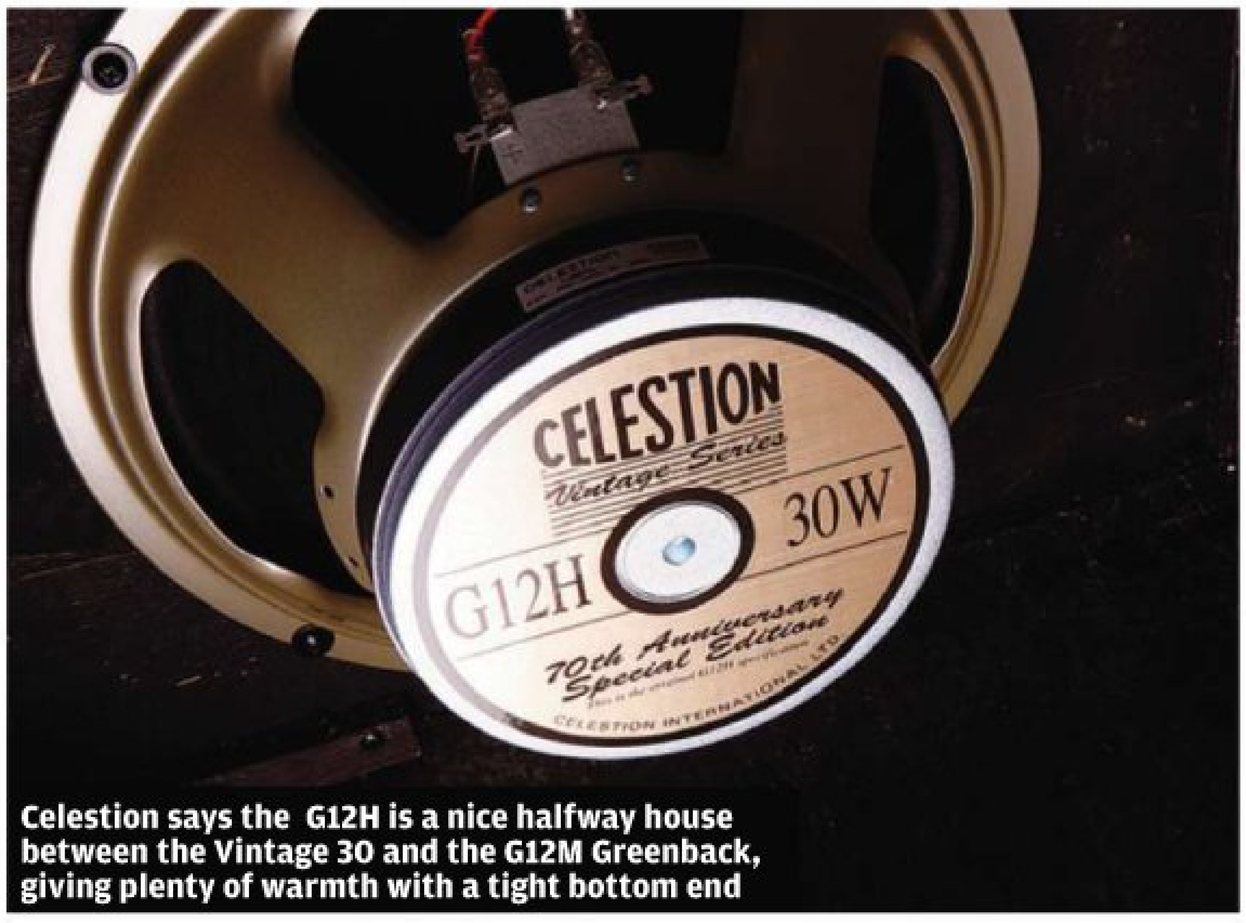
Buying a 'big name' amplifier usually involves buying into a visual and sonic aesthetic. For instance, you'd buy a Marshall if you wanted that great Marshall sound and look, and you wouldn't expect it to cover Vox or Fender-type sounds. However, for makers whose brand names aren't indelibly linked with any particular style or music genre, there's far more scope for technical creativity and tonal variety.

It's just as well, because – whatever you think of them – digital modelling amps have changed our expectations of what an amp should be able to do. There are only so many ways that you can make valves work; besides speakers, transformers, cabinet design and so forth, the sonic signature of an amp largely depends on the circuit design and the choice of components. In theory, if you can make these factors switchable, you can design an all-valve amp with a range of tones that can rival the modelling brigade... and that seems to be the thinking behind the Egnater Tweaker.

The 'tweakability' stems from five small toggle switches on the control panel. First there's a Deep/Tight switch that cuts the lowest frequencies at the input stage of the preamp to keep overdriven tones from getting too muddy (the Deep setting is recommended for single-coil guitars and for fattening up clean tones). Secondly, the Bright/Normal switch boosts the high end for extra sparkle on clean sounds and extra bite with distortion. It interacts with the Gain control; Bright is more noticeable with low Gain settings and has no effect with Gain above three o'clock. Thirdly, the Hot/Clean switch sets the gain, much like a regular channel switch, and the Vintage/Modern switch modifies the power amp circuit from tonally neutral in Vintage mode to boosted lows and highs in Modern mode.

One added switch really defines what the Tweaker is all about. It's a three-way switch marked USA, AC and Brit, and it toggles between three classic circuits and three distinctive voicings: USA duplicates the circuits found in Fender's 'blackface' amps, Brit conjures up 'the stronger lower midrange girth' that you may associate with Marshall, and AC provides another British voicing that's inspired by Vox amps.

In addition to these switches you get Gain and Master volume controls along with Treble, Middle and Bass. At the



Celestion says the G12H is a nice halfway house between the Vintage 30 and the G12M Greenback, giving plenty of warmth with a tight bottom end

The Tweaker's defining feature is a three-way switch which toggles between Fender blackface, British rock and Vox-inspired voicings

FACTFILE

TWEAKER

Specs: 25W 1x12" combo with three 12AX7 and two 6V6 valves, FX loop, Celestion G12-H 70th Anniversary Special Edition. Made in China

Controls: Switches – Tight/Deep, Bright/Normal, Hot/Clean, USA/AC/Brit, Vintage/Modern, Play/Standby, On/Off. Controls – Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Master

Price: £529

Contact:
Guitar Guitar
0191 261 1568
www.egnateramps.com

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The EQ might look simple, but combine it with the voicing switches and you've got a huge host of tone options

Two 6V6 output valves and hefty transformers make the Tweaker very loud for a 15-watter

THE COMPETITION

BLACKSTAR
HT STUDIO 20 Head & HTV112 1x12" Cab

All-valve 20W head with two EL34, two ECC83s, two channels, three-band EQ, digital reverb, FX loop, speaker-emulated output, 16 & 8 Ohm speaker out. HTV112 1x12" cab with a Celestion

RRP: Head £379, cab £159

VHT
LEAD 20 COMBO AV-GT1-20

All-valve 20W combo with two EL84s and four 12AX7s, two channels, AXL reverb, 12" Celestion G12H30, Clean Volume, Gain, overdrive Level, Reverb, Master Volume, 8 ohm and 16 ohm speaker outputs

RRP: £408

JET CITY
JCA2112RC

A single-channel 20W combo that covers much of the same territory as the Tweaker. Two EL84s and five 12AX7s, spring reverb, 1x12" Eminence speaker

RRP: £399

rear you'll find an effects loop, but there are no level controls. The speaker output impedance can be set to 4, 8 or 16 Ohms, and there's a speaker extension socket.

The valves number three 12AX7s and two 6V6GTAs in the power stage, so the rectifier is solid state. Cosmetically the Tweaker is certainly attractive, with a thin ply cabinet, nicely applied black tolex and a 'basketweave' front. This is also an example of a mid-price amplifier that comes factory-fitted with a well-regarded bigname speaker – in this case a Celestion G12H-30 70th Anniversary Special Edition.

SOUNDS

Quoted wattage is hardly a reliable indicator of loudness, so let's just say this is a very loud 15W amplifier. As far at the Hot/Clean switch goes, 'Clean' is a relative term because the Tweaker can still get mightily overdriven in this mode. However it does deliver loud clean tones, and rather than running with Master flat out and Gain near minimum, the trick to maximising clean headroom is to roll back Master and wind Gain up a little further.

Just how much clean you get depends on the position of the voicing switch. In USA mode it's bright and clear, with AC producing a softer and sweeter tone with a degree of jangle. Brit has the least amount of clean headroom, but it's fat and has a delicious growl in the low mids. Regardless of the Tight/Deep setting, the Tweaker has a tight, solid low end intensity that belies the size of the cab.

No doubt the G12H helps in this regard, but until it is completely broken in you might detect some upper frequency harshness. This brightness also increases as you turn up Gain, but I still found the Bright setting useful at lower volumes. So, in Clean mode the Tweaker takes you from fairly loud clean tones to heavy power amp overdrive with three very effective and distinct voicings.

Moving over to Hot mode, the switches and controls combine to create a range of tones that's almost overwhelming; if you suffer from tone paranoia, this amp could make your life problematic. The key is learning how the switches combine and interact with the EQ controls – and you'll need to put the time in.

For all its clean capabilities this is a rock amp with an undercurrent of aggression, not a sweet-toned honey monster

Although Hot mode delivers some subtle overdrives, at the other end of the Gain scale it's obvious that Egnater is serious about crunch. Of the three simulations, Brit comes closest to meeting our expectations. AC has the brownest tone, especially with Middle boosted and Treble rolled back, and USA, in Modern mode with Deep on, veers towards the glassy presence and brutal lows of a MESA. So, impressive blues and rock, classic metal, fusion, modern metal – all in a small amp that could fool a mic into thinking it's a half-stack. However, you might agree that P90s and humbuckers cope with the Tweaker's slight brashness better than F-type single coils.

VERDICT

Despite its versatility, the Tweaker is slightly compromised. Because none of the voicing switches are footswitchable it's only capable of giving one tone at a time, so you can't easily exploit that versatility when playing live. Unless you use rackmount or line-level effects, the effects loop probably won't be of much interest, so perhaps the extra valve that buffers the loop could have been better utilised for onboard spring reverb duties for plug-in-and-go players. For all its clean capabilities, it's a rock amp not a sweet-toned Class A honey monster, with an undercurrent of aggression than many players will relish. If touch dynamics and sound-shaping via the guitar controls are your priorities, there might be better amps – but it would be useful for any recording session.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	17/20
Versatility	17/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**84%**

Good for... **clean to crunchy rock tones, tweakability, portability**

Look elsewhere... **for touch dynamics, instant sounds, gigging ergonomics**

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A JFET overdrive and a tone-sculpting modern rock distortion are the latest from Bolton's Rothwell. Review by Will Nicholas

Rothwell

Tornado Overdrive & Switchblade Distortion

FACTFILE

TORNADO

Specs: overdrive/distortion pedal. Made in the UK

Controls: Gain, Tone, Volume, Shift and true bypass on/off switches

Price: £139

Contact:
Rothwell Audio Products
01204 366133
www.rothwellaudio products.co.uk

We've got quite a stompbox revolution happening in Lancashire. It's all thanks to Rothwell, whose products range from clean boosts to overdrives and distortions plus a compressor and a loop switch. Their latest toys are both dirt-inclined, and we set out to test them to the limits.

TORNADO

The Tornado is a class A, single-ended overdrive using JFETs. The controls are Volume, Gain and Tone, with a Shift button that alters the midrange content and changes the turnover frequency to produce vintage and modern sounds.

It's often said that very valve-like overdrive can be coaxed out of Field Effect Transistors. Everything depends on your perception of 'valve overdrive', mind, because the term can be applied to preamp and power amp valves. Classic-

The midshift button can come in useful when the Tornado's at full tilt

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Price: £139

style valve amp overdrive generally involves a combination of both, whereas high-gain amps usually rely on preamp valve distortion with a clean-running power stage to keep things tight. While valves can be effective in pedals that attempt to create preamp-style distortion, they're not necessarily the best choice for replicating the overdriven tones of a vintage-type valve amplifier.

From mild overdrive to distortion and well suited to humbuckers, the Switchblade has a voice of its own

SOUNDS

The Tornado gives juicy, smooth classic amp overdrive/distortion along with a hint of touch-sensitive compression plus lashings of sustain. The term 'warm' is badly overused, but in this instance it's appropriate. Of course one person's 'warm' is often another's 'dull' but the Tornado pulls off that rare trick of retaining clarity without being too bright.

There's no completely neutral setting: even at the bottom of the Gain range there's a subtle rumble of overdrive. The midrange is full, the bass is rich, and the treble is just sufficient to allow your guitar to breathe. You'll hear your natural tone along with all your pickup settings.

The Gain control appears to adjust frequency response as well as overdrive and distortion levels – and there's plenty of both. Between 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock the Gain increase comes with a shift towards the upper midrange... more 'preamp-like,' perhaps. Above 2 o'clock, distortion noticeably increases, becoming a bit fizzy with single coils.

Up to this point the Shift hadn't made much sense. I felt that it could be useful taking the edge off when running distortion into a bright, clean amp, but with tweed or darker Vox-style circuits the treble attenuation was a touch extreme and the Tone control lost effectiveness. However, Shift is certainly useful when you run the Tornado anywhere near maximum gain.

SWITCHBLADE

According to Rothwell, the Switchblade features three stages of distortion with carefully-designed filtering before, between and after each stage to sculpt the sound and control the way each stage adds to the distortion. The controls are Volume, Gain and Tone.

SOUNDS

The Switchblade is a wilder ride than the Tornado. It's similarly touch-sensitive and dynamic, but it has a much sharper edge. The greater sense of openness and pick attack will please Strat players who like the glassy attack that characterises many of Hendrix's best tones. This glassiness remains to add a certain sparkle as you back off your volume to clean things up.

Some single-coil players might prefer it to be a little softer, sweeter and more refined, but the Switchblade is an awesome tone shaper for humbuckers. With an LP the characteristics of both pickups came through, with the neck sounding particularly vocal and the bridge more focused and aggressive than usual.

The term 'transparent' is an odd one. Taken to its logical extreme, it would suggest a pedal that generates an effect without adding any sonic character of its own; a more pragmatic definition might include pedals that allow playing dynamics and the timbre of an instrument to come through without muddying or squishing the signal.

The Switchblade is a wilder ride than the Tornado – still touch-sensitive and dynamic, but with a much sharper edge

The Switchblade certainly fits this second set of conditions. At unity volume and low gain the mids might appear slightly scooped, but to my ears it's more like a bass and treble boost. There's nothing you can do to adjust the bass and the Tone control doesn't appear to operate in the same band as the preset treble boost, but we'd say the Switchblade's basic character is a subtle enhancement with a slightly nasal 'rock honk'. At low gain you get a valve-like mild overdrive that makes a quiet, clean amp sound like it's just hitting the sweet spot. There's also enough clean boost to push those front end tubes. This morphs into a crunchy, expressive distortion that retains note definition and bottom end clarity, with a hint of fizziness only becoming apparent towards maximum gain.

VERDICT

The Tornado is a very playable and enjoyable heavy overdrive that integrates superbly with your guitar and amp setup while adding a degree of touch-sensitivity and body. The preamp tube-style overdrive of the Switchblade bridges the gap between old school and contemporary hard rock distortion, while stopping short of crassly mid-scooped crunch; fabulous sustain and effortless pinched harmonics make soloing a joy, and heavy rhythm parts really chug and pummel the senses. We admire the way that Andrew Rothwell avoids trying to make his pedals do too much. Each one seems like a pedal with a real purpose.

FINAL SCORE Tornado	
Build Quality	18/20
Versatility	17/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	88%

Good for... cleanish boost, valvey overdrive/distortion and creamy sustain

Look elsewhere... for death metal crunch

FINAL SCORE Switchblade	
Build Quality	18/20
Versatility	16/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	88%

Good for... classic Marshall-style overdrive and distortion with outstanding clarity and definition

Look elsewhere... For TS-style midrange hump

FACTFILE

SWITCHBLADE

Specs: overdrive/distortion pedal. Made in the UK

Controls: Gain, Tone, Volume, true bypass on/off switch

Price: £139

THE COMPETITION

CROWTHER
Hot Cake

Emlyn Crowther handbuilds these monsters in New Zealand. Great natural overdrive with tons of guitar tone

RRP: £135

BEN ROD
Cream Can

This circuit utilises a pair of Mosfets along with germanium and silicon diodes and a dedicated op amp to generate the overdrive gain

RRP: €160

BLACKSTONE
Mosfet Overdrive

This well-regarded pedal provides two footswitchable channels, each with its own drive and level settings, and true bypass

RRP: £219

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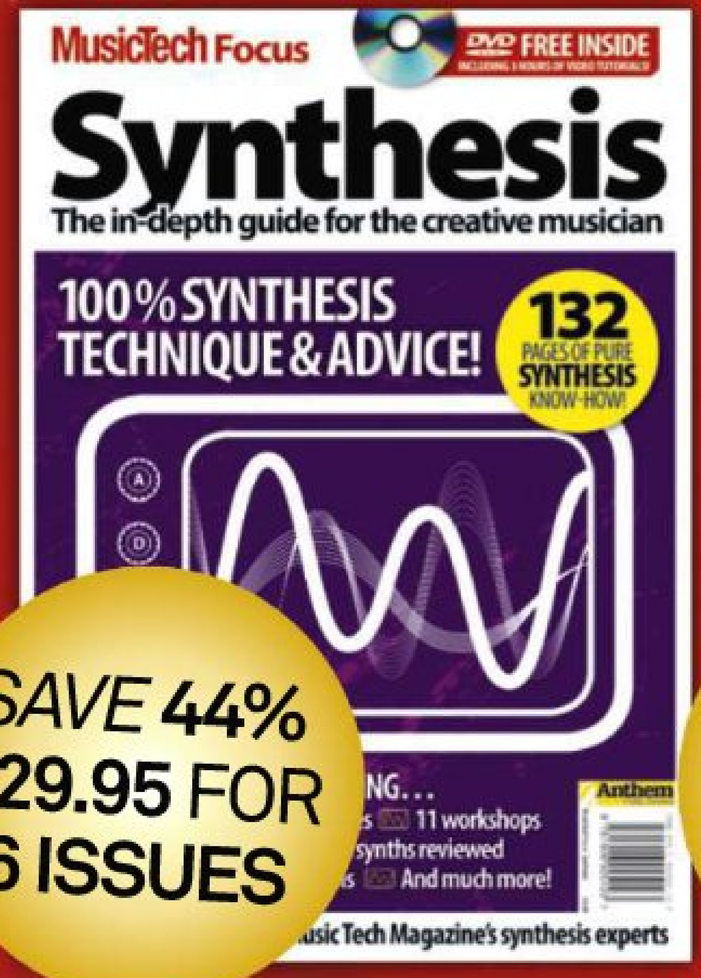

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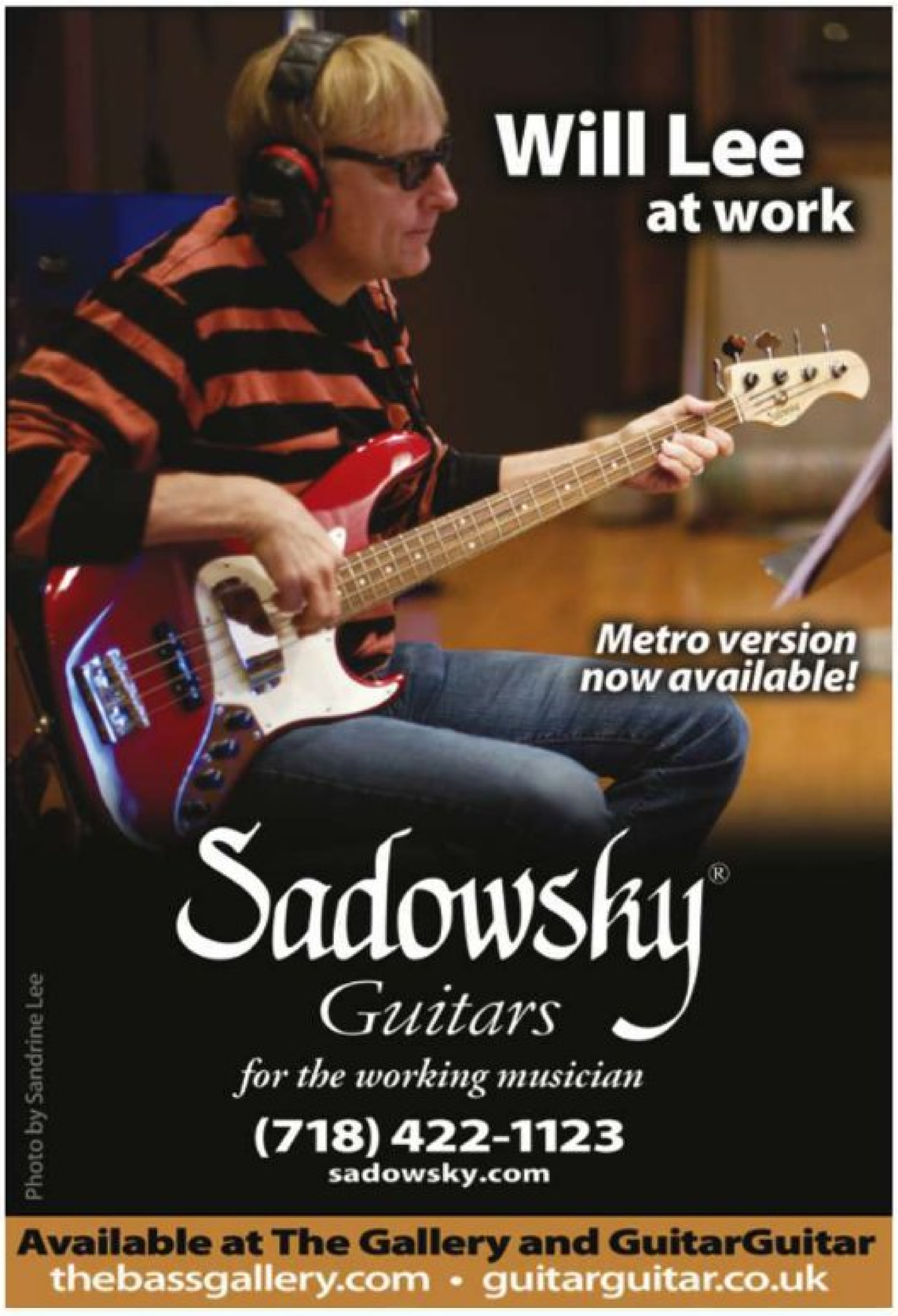

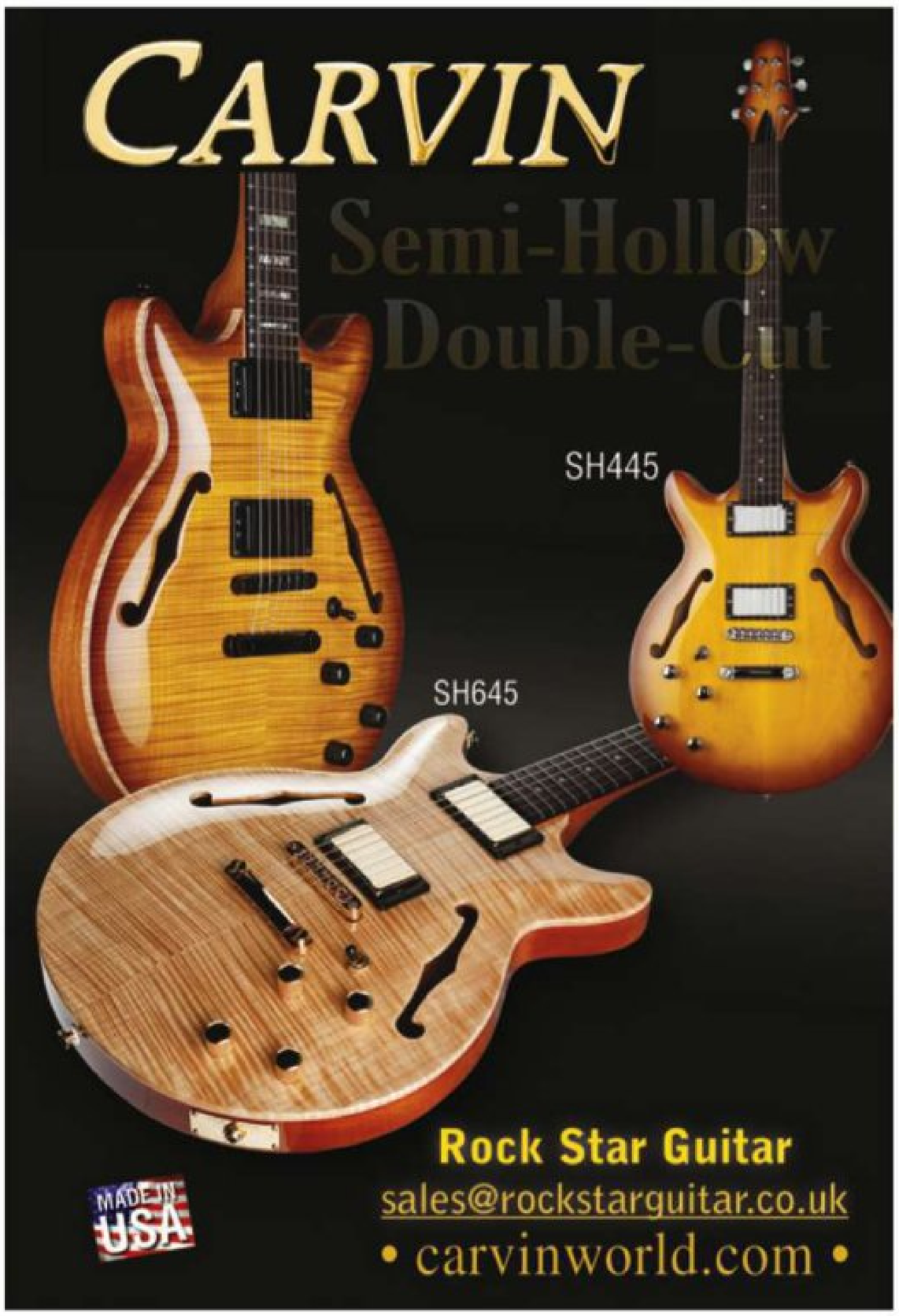

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From the mighty roar of a big rig to crazed squeals and insane octave jumps, these two pedals from the faithful Boss are on the extreme side. Review by Martyn Casserly

Boss

ST-2 Power Stack & PS-6 Harmonist

There's something about the arrival of a couple of new Boss pedals that always warms the cockles of this reviewer's heart, and in this weather we could all use some hot cockles. From the reassuringly the solid colours to the boxes hewn from purest hard, truly they are a place of refuge in the storm of life. Joining the none-more-boxy lineup today we have the ST-2 Power Stack & PS-6 Harmonist units, both of whom promise much in the way of sonic delectation.

The Sound knob alters gain and sound character all at the same time

ST-2 POWER STACK

With a name like Power Stack and the no-nonsense black livery, there's no prizes for guessing the nature of this one. Essentially the ST-2 claims to give your combo the sound of a stack, without the need for roadies or the purchase of snug leather trousers. Controls are clear and simple with Level, Bass, Treble, and the all-important Sound. Whereas you might

FACTFILE

ST-2 POWER STACK

Specs: Overdrive/distortion pedal, one 9V battery or 9V power supply. Made in Taiwan

Controls: Level, Bass, Treble, and Sound dials. On/Off footswitch

Price: £99

THE COMPETITION

MARSHALL
BLUESBREAKER 2

It doesn't do multiple stack tones, but if you want a prime bit of British beef, this little monster packs a huge punch

RRP: £50

ELECTRO-HARMONIX
ENGLISH MUFF'N

British Invasion style pedal which features true bypass, two onboard valves, and oodles of tasty tones

RRP: £125

LINE 6
FLOOR POD PLUS

Another feature-packed unit from Line 6. Plenty of amp models available, plus a fair smattering of pedals too

RRP: £189

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Price: £99 & £149

Sonic insanity is just a knob twiddle away with the PS-6 Harmonist

FACTFILE

PS-6 HARMONIST

Specs: Harmoniser, pitch-shifter and auto-whammy pedal. One 9V battery or 9V power supply. Made in Taiwan

Controls: Multi-function Balance, Shift, Key, and Mode controls. On/Off footswitch

Price: £149

expect this to be your normal Gain control – and in many ways it is – the tonality also changes as you move through the three settings of Crunch, Drive and Ultra.

SOUNDS

On a clean amp setting the Crunch adds a cool bluesy bite with a bit more oomph, great for those funkier Hendrix and SRV licks. There's a subtle increase in the gain across the Crunch third of the control, meaning you can fine-tune the sound to taste before the Drive circuit takes over. Entering the Drive portion things get a bit spicy, with more overdrive and grunt available. Big Foo Fighters-type chords launch themselves from the amp with gay abandon, with a surprising amount of clarity retained for picking out individual notes in the chords. Dial in the Ultra and you're away in metal land with enough chug and fizz to raise Cthulhu himself from his watery abyss. Using the pedal with an already driven amp results in even more aggression, and the ST-2 proves to be an excellent solo booster.

PS-6 HARMONIST

Now the name might sound a bit like a new-age life coach, but beneath the electric blue paintwork lies some rather clever circuitry. The controls on this pedal are far more complicated than the ST-2's. Each of them serves more than one function, depending on the mode you are in. Balance adjusts the mix of dry and effected signal; Shift selects the pitch for the harmony (ie down or up an octave, third, fourth or sixth, etc); Key allows you to tune the harmony to the song you're playing, and with Mode you can select whether it's a minor or major.

Other options on the Mode control are for a Pitch Shifter (which you adjust using the Shift control), a Detuner (same again) and what will no doubt be the most used feature – the S-Bend. If you've ever wanted to emulate the wild octave jumps of Tom Morello, Satriani or Vai but didn't really want to buy a Digitech Whammy for the pleasure, then the S-Bend might be of great interest.

If you want to emulate the wild octave jumps of Morello, Satriani or Vai, try the PS-6's S-Bend – but don't overdo it

In S-Bend mode the pedal acts as a whammy-style control by always being off until you press it, then it instantly bends the note you're playing to either hilariously high frequencies or equally amusing low ones. Adjusting the Shift control alters where the pitch will go, with the Balance and Key dials now controlling the attack and decay rates. It's hard to explain just how much fun this trick is, but we know that this feature alone will sell a tidy quantity of the PS-6. A word of caution, though: overuse of the S-Bend – such as deciding to play every single solo with it – will have your bandmates whacking you around the head with the nearest available chair at your next pub gig. You have been warned.

The Harmony mode itself is also seriously impressive. Once you've done the maths and worked out what key it should be in (this really isn't a hit-and-hope sort of pedal) you're rewarded with laser-pointed tracking for anything you can throw at it, and as the unit is polyphonic it can even handle chords with ease. Every mode is quality, and the accompanying manual helps make sense of it all.

VERDICT

The ST-2 is a great overdrive/distortion pedal that will beef up any weedy amp with stack-style tones. By itself it's cracking, but add an already cooking amp and you're in for a hell of a ride. For the more musically aware the PS-6 is an incredible pedal, with plenty of functionality, features and enough smile-inducing charm to last for a very long time. Well done Boss... again.

FINAL SCORE PowerStack

Build Quality	18/20
Versatility	17/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**88%**

Good for... **kicking a sagging amp into life**
Look elsewhere... **if you like pretty colours**

FINAL SCORE Harmonist

Build Quality	20/20
Versatility	16/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**87%**

Good for... **expanding your sound**
Look elsewhere... **if you want something simple**

THE COMPETITION

DIGITECH
EX-7 EXPRESSION FACTORY
Fantastic multi-effect pedal with wahs, pitchshifters, volume and even a uni-vibe mode. Great stuff!
RRP: £223

BEHRINGER
ULTRA SHIFTER
Impressively-priced pitchshifting and harmonising offering from Behringer's compact pedal range
RRP: £59

EVENTIDE
PITCHFACTOR
Deluxe model from the pro-end of the market. Hugely configurable and MIDI-capable. Pretty pricey, though
RRP: £459

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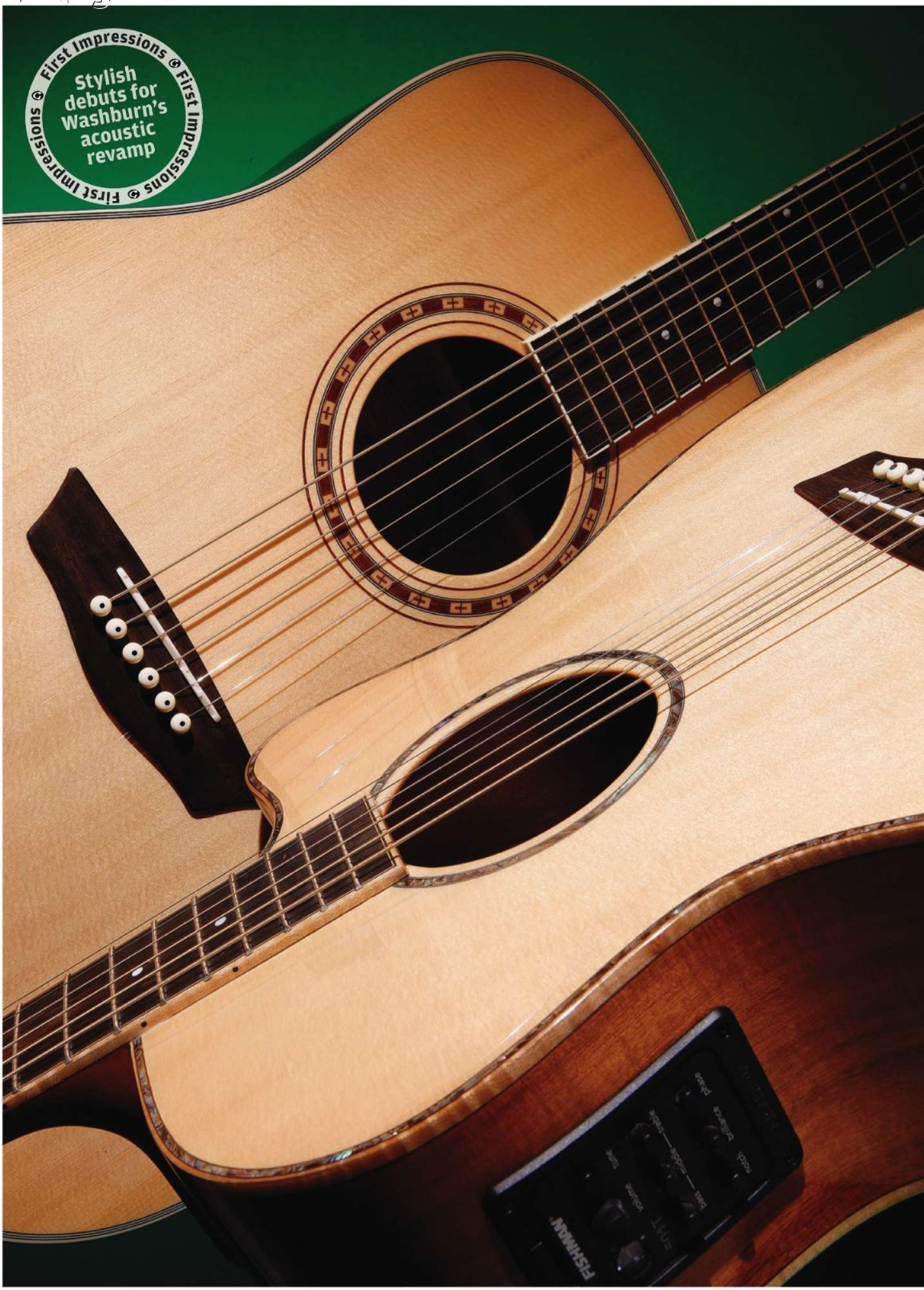
First Impressions

Stylish debuts for Washburn's acoustic revamp



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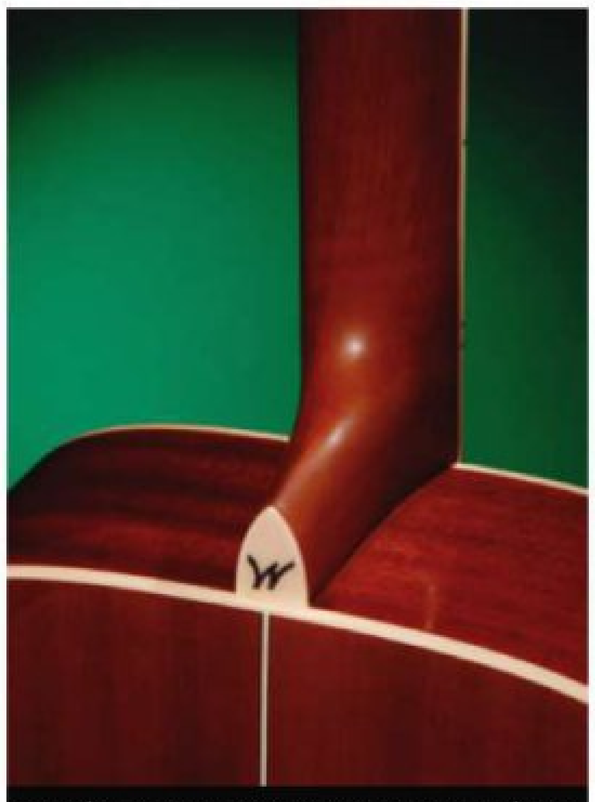
Price: £170

If Washburn has been swamped in recent times by the flood of new import names, they're now fighting back with new models and some updated favourites. Review by Jerry Uwins

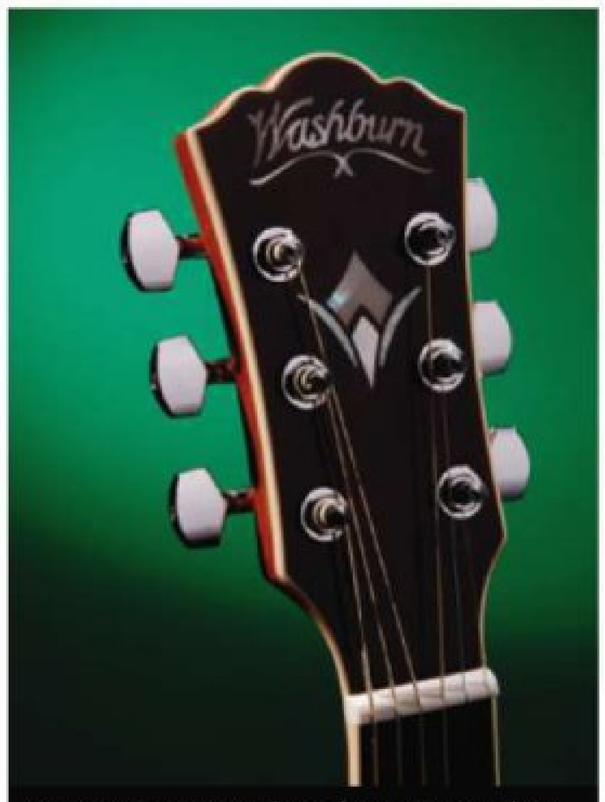
Washburn

WD10S & WG55SCE

Washburn announced an entirely new acoustic line-up earlier this year, and shipments have finally begun arriving. Availability will eventually extend, among others, to revamped series like the Festival electros and all-solid-wood Timbercrafts, but first in are various numerical-series instruments, kicking off with starter models like the 7 Series and moving on with higher-priced instruments including a revised version of the company's highly successful D10S dreadnought, now dubbed the WD10S. Apart from the expected gamut of dreadnoughts, the range is notable for including WMJ mini-jumbos and WG grand auditoriums, body styles not previously done by Washburn. Our top-range WG55SCE electro is one example.



Laminated mahogany back and sides and solid spruce top remain from the WD10S, but some details are new



You get better trimmings, too, with an ornate headstock with logo and inlay in pearl on a rosewood veneer

WD10S

The D10, originally of all-laminate build, was launched in 1990, and along with its subsequently solid-top D10S successor, has been claimed by the company as the world's biggest-selling acoustic. It's certainly sold by the shedload over the years. In its new WD incarnation the guitar has been given a more upmarket image, though the price has only gone up by a few pounds. The most obvious upgrade is the headstock which, instead of the old model's plain, V-topped affair, now adopts Washburn's bound, crowned design, with pearl logo and motif inlaid on a rosewood capping. Down on the gloss solid spruce/laminate-mahogany body, the scratchplate has been removed; there's revised wood-marquetry for the rosette inlay, and a wing-style bridge replaces the previous belly variety. The nut and saddle are both bone, and that's pretty unusual to find on a budget box.

The WD10S does a decent job for the dosh. Well-balanced, with adequate warmth and good sustain, it's a likeably competent strummer

The three-piece, 25.5"-scale neck carries a smooth satin finish and has a regular width (with a versatile 55mm string spacing at the bridge). It's fashioned to a shallow 'C' profile which,

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	17/20
Sound	15/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	13/20
TOTAL	**81%**

Good for... classy-looking dreadnought model with good budget value

Look elsewhere... a bit more punch sound-wise

FACTFILE

WD10S

Description: Dreadnought acoustic. Made in China

Price: £170

Build: Solid sitka top, laminated mahogany back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret cream-bound rosewood board. Rosewood bridge, bone nut/saddle, chrome tuners, strap button

Options: WD10S12 12-string (£205), WD10SCE cutaway electro with Fishman Isys+ preamp (£205), 12-string WD10SCE12 (£264)

Left-handers: WD10S-LH (£170), WD10SCE-LH (£217)

Finish: Gloss natural body, satin neck (also available in black – same price)

Scale length: 648mm

Neck width:
Nut 43.5mm
12th fret 54.5mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
9th fret 22mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 55mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.6mm
12th fret bass 2.1mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 2.14kg/4.7lb

THE COMPETITION

VINTAGE
V400

Solid spruce top on nato back/sides. Five gloss colours to choose from including natural

RRP: £169

STAGG
JAMES NELIGAN NA30

Solid spruce/mahogany with maple body/neck bindings and wood-inlaid soundhole rosette

RRP: £199

TANGLEWOOD
TW28SSN

Spruce/mahogany dread with one-piece neck, bone nut and saddle and maple bindings

RRP: £219

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Price: £452

FACTFILE

WG55SCE

Description: Cutaway grand auditorium electro-acoustic. Made in China

Price: £452

Build: Solid sitka spruce top, laminated koa back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret maple-bound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, gold diecast tuners, bottom strap button. Undersaddle pickup; Fishman 501T (Presys+) preamp with Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, Brilliance, Phase, Notch, Tuner On/Off and LED, low-battery LED, quick-release battery holder

Options: WD55SCE cutaway electro dreadnought (£452). For a grand auditorium alternative try solid spruce/mahogany WG15SCE (£264) also with Presys+

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss natural body, satin neck

Scale length: 648mm

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 54mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
9th fret 21.5mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 55mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm

Max rim depth: 124mm

Max body width: 395mm

Fingerboard radius: 15"

Weight: 2.2kg/4.85lb

Contact:
Sound Technology
01462 480000
www.soundtech.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

CRAFTER
GAE8/N

Solid spruce/mahogany with abalone rosette and neck markers; LR-T RX four-band preamp with tuner and phase

RRP: £429

TAKAMINE
EG460SC

Cutaway mini-jumbo in solid spruce/rosewood with abalone purfling and rosette. Tuner-loaded TP4T preamp offers a three-band EQ

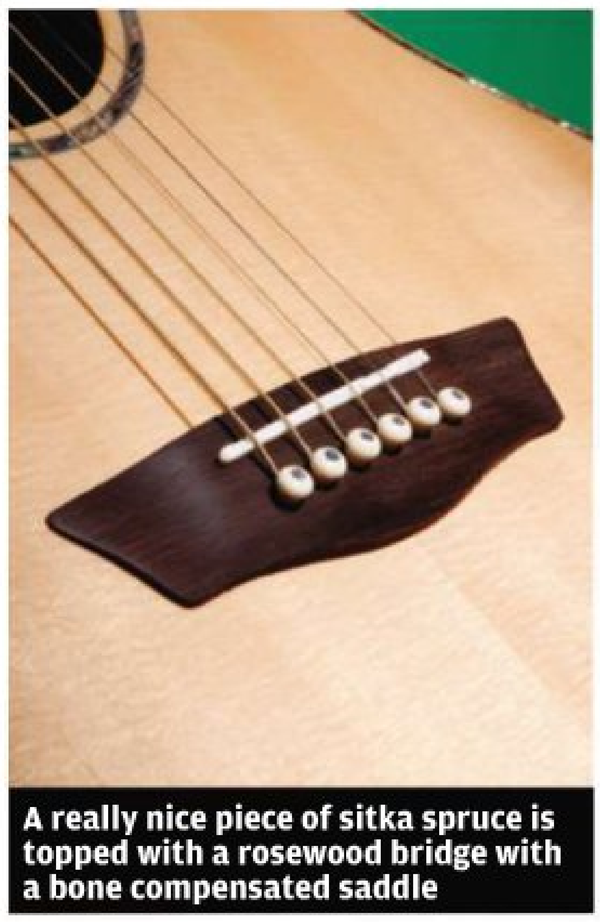
RRP: £439

WALDEN
G740CE

Nitrocellulose-lacquered in spruce/mahogany with solid top and back. Carries a Fishman Presys+ system as on Washburn's WG55SCE

RRP: £445

The familiar Fishman Presys+ has a four-band EQ, a feedback-killing Phase Reverse and a usable tuner



A really nice piece of sitka spruce is topped with a rosewood bridge with a bone compensated saddle

The WG555SCE is a real looker in koa with maple trim, and the slim neck offers a delightfully comfortable, almost electric-like feel

allied to our sample's slinky set-up, offers speedy, snug playability. The action, though, is a bit ambitiously low, causing occasional fret buzz here and there. The fretting on the cream-bound fingerboard could use more smoothly rounded ends but is otherwise well fitted and dressed. One irritation – applicable to the WG too – is sharp nut corners, but that's easily cured with a few strokes of a file.

SOUNDS

While not the punchiest dread in the world, the WD10S does a decent job for the dosh. The quite neutrally toned delivery, if a shade tinny in the highs, is well-balanced across the strings; there's adequate warmth in the bottom end, and sustain is good. In short, this guitar is a likeably competent strummer.

WG55SCE

This deep-rimmed, cutaway grand auditorium is a real looker in its deluxe trim. The solid spruce top, close-grained and nicely cross-silked, is partnered by laminated koa back and sides, while the top has an abalone rosette and purfling. The whole body is bound in coachlined maple, including a back centre strip. The koa isn't figured as such, but its honey-gold hue is right on the money, enhanced by the gloss lacquer's faultless buffing.

The maple-edged theme, with light/dark purfling strips, is continued for the neck, extending across the upper end of the dark rosewood fingerboard and around the headstock which carries gold Grover-style diecast tuners and a body-matching koa overlay. The satin-mahogany neck itself, again 25.5" scale and three-piece, is a shade slimmer than the WD10S's, and though similarly shallow, the profile adds a hint of a 'D' along the shoulders, providing a delightfully comfortable, almost electric-like feel. The set-up is again speedily low – and this time largely buzz-free – but the fret ends would once more benefit from further dressing. One omission is no heel strap button, something that should be a given on cutaway electros.

Although marked up as a 501T, the guitar's Fishman preamp is actually a Presys+ providing four-band EQ and notching, all on small rotaries. In addition there is phase reverse and an auto-chromatic tuner with a circular, and accurate, LED display. The tuner usefully mutes the system when plugged in.

SOUNDS

Considering its deep body, the WG55SCE is a relatively polite grand auditorium, and you might expect a bit more out-front wallop. There's a hint of compression in the dynamics too. That said, the tone, though not very rich, is nicely tempered and sustainful, with a pleasing, subtly feathery attack. Save for our sample's dominant bottom E undersaddle output which necessitates reining back the bass, the Presys+ does a respectable job. There's ample gain, and the EQ ranges are responsive without being extreme. The sound is a touch hard-edged without some middle cut, but sort that out and it's pretty much plain sailing.

VERDICT

There's an element of 'wow' factor that's missing in the sound of both these two Washburns, but nevertheless both these guitars remain attractive propositions... the WD10S not least for its classy makeover and still-keen price; the WG55SCE for being, well, dead handsome. Their necks are excellent too, and build quality is commendably up to snuff.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	15/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	15/20
TOTAL	83%

Good for... tastefully sumptuous trim; great neck; versatile powered abilities

Look elsewhere... more acoustic beef; pre-fitted second strap button

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First Impressions

A great but obscure name gets a modern makeover

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Price: £1766

The name of Larson is near-holy in vintage acoustic guitar circles. Can these brand-new remakes capture the atmosphere of these sought-after rarities? Review by Rick Batey

Larson Bros

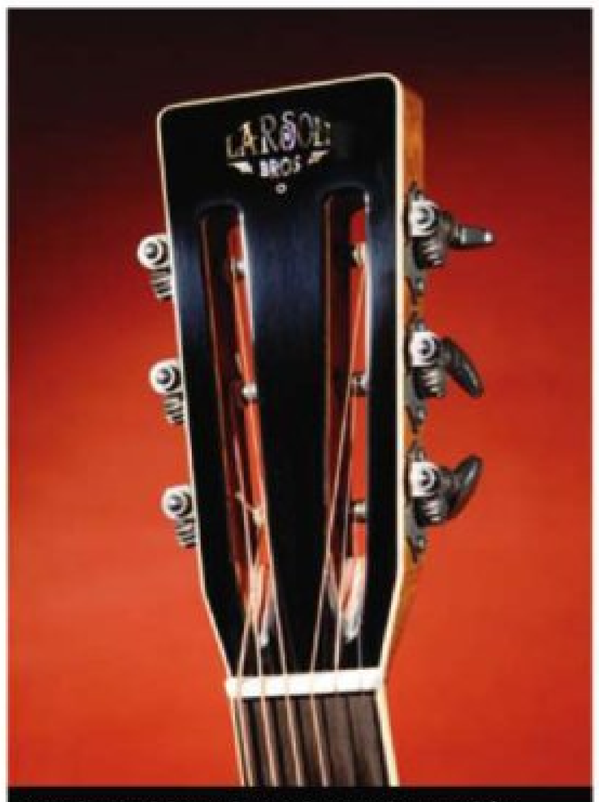
Maurer Style 1-ES

From the end of the 19th century until the mid-'40s, Carl and August Larson of Chicago built guitars, harp guitars and mandolins. These instruments were highly innovative for their time, with laminated X-bracing, parabolically-curved tops and backs, and unique truss rod technology. Some were oversized monsters while others were extremely beautiful, with delicate outlines and fine pearl decoration.

You'll never see an original with 'Larson' on the headstock or the label – the brothers always worked for other brands. Old Maurers, Prairie States and Euphonons are always Larsons; Dyers, Stetsons and Stahls can be, but not always. Others were made for individual stores, or under no name at all, so identifying them can be a fanatic's task: the style of the inlays, the line of ebony under the fretboard binding, the flattened pyramid bridge, and so on.

The reappearance of 'Larson' brand guitars, designed by German luthier Toni Gotz, does offer a refreshing change from the over-familiar Martin/Gibson design influence. There are three models: the Prairie State jumbo, the Stetson dread, and this Maurer 000. All are available in two series: Standard (solid woods, dovetail joint, laminated bracing, built in Vietnam) or ES (solid woods with 'aged' Euro spruce tops and a bolt-on neck, built in Czechoslovakia). There are also two lavish Presentation series guitars, a Maurer and a small-bodied 12-fret Stahl.

The mahogany neck carries a slotted headstock and is fitted with a set of aged-patina open-geared Gotohs



Neck and headstock are bound in cream plastic, the nut is bone and the head overlay is glossy ebony

The reappearance of 'Larson' brand guitars does offer a refreshing change from the over-familiar Martin/Gibson design influence

Our Maurer is a Style 1-ES: mahogany back and sides, spruce top. The body is fairly close in dimensions to the 12-fret Martin 000, but a quarter-inch wider across the upper bouts with softer, more feminine curves. Crucially, Larson offers both a 12-fret and 14-fret model; on this 14-fret version the bridge has been moved up the body, resulting in a long, deep-bellied look which some would say lacks the natural balance and grace of a 12-fret guitar. The internal bracing – which is neat and sharply-carved – has been completely redesigned, too.

We have no details on the '17th century aging techniques' used on the Euro spruce top, but it's a characterful piece, with slightly wavy grain ranging from medium to tight and with a large patch of run-out in the lower bouts. The solid mahogany sides are pretty and streaky, the back more plain – it's a very nice piece of wood. Top and

FACTFILE

MAURER 1-ES

Description: OOO-sized acoustic with 12-fret style body and 14-fret neck. Made in Czechoslovakia

Price: £1766 inc. hard case

Build: Solid spruce top, solid mahogany back/sides. Mahogany neck with slotted headstock; ebony fingerboard, head overlay, bridge and bridge pins. Pearl logo and fancy position markers. Gotoh open tuners, plastic nut and saddle, single strap button

Options: Maurer available in Standard series (from £1270) and with rosewood back/sides in ES series (£2014)

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss body, satin neck

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck Width:
Nut 43.8mm
12th fret 54mm

Depth of neck:
Nut 22.5mm
10th fret 25.2mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 54mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 3.1mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm

Max rim depth: 103mm

Max body width: 384mm

Fingerboard radius: 14"

Weight: 4lbs/1.82kg

Contact:
www.htd-uk.com
01722 410002
www.larsonbros.de

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THE COMPETITION

MARTIN
000-18

Plain and purposeful with that famous name on the headstock, the mahogany/sitka 000-18 has a fine, dry, sweet tone. It's a Martin... and it sounds like one

PRICE: around £1600

BROOK
Lyn Mahogany/Spruce

Delicious 'crows foot' purfling and a 12-fret neck with a 1.75" nut gives the British-built Lyn a dose of real old-time charm

RRP: £1895

DAVE KING
Katrina

A 12-fret 000, built in the UK on 1930s lines with a long 25.4" scale and a solid peghead. Available in mahogany with a choice of sitka or Engelmann

RRP: £1850

back are bound in cream plastic: the back has multi-ply black/white purfling, the top has tasty rope purfling with alternating stripes of maple, rosewood and ebony – one of the Maurer's nicest features. Rope binding surrounds the soundhole, which has its inner edge encased in white binding for an olde-worlde look. The body is finished in gloss poly all over, but it's thin enough to allow a smidgen of grain direction to show through. The ebony bridge is a pyramid design, like old Maurers, and has a compensated plastic saddle giving a string spacing of 54mm, or 2 1/4" – 1/16" less than a vintage-spec Martin 000, but fine for fingerpicking. The pins are also ebony, with a unique profile that's enjoyably different.

The mahogany neck has a stacked heel and is built to a long 25.6" scale and has a flat matte finish on the back and a glossy ebony headstock face. Truss rod adjustment is via the soundhole: the Allen key required is tiny. The ebony fingerboard, like old Larsons, mixes its position markers – some dots, long elaborate motifs at the fifth and ninth frets, and a single rose at the third. Neck and head are both bound, and the slotted headstock is fitted with open-geared Gotohs with an aged-looking patina.

With a 1.75" nut and a decidedly deep, veed neck profile, the Maurer does have a vintage character in the hand. The fingerboard has a steep radius – more curved than any other acoustic we can think of. It's tough going, as our guitar's set up includes a high nut, a high saddle and too much neck relief. Sighting down the board, we'd say the neck set is adequate, but not generous. Only after a pro set-up for a fingerstyle action would you find out how much saddle is left.

The Maurer's neck is a real pre-war handful. Rosewood back and sides are an option for £250 extra

The European spruce top has been subjected to a mystery ageing process. Ebony bridge has matching ebony pins

With a thumbpick the Maurer Style 1-ES is bright and funky; with a pick it seems relatively modern – glassy and overtoney, with ample sustain

SOUND

Larson's owners says the Maurer's redesigned bracing makes it sound 'unbelievably close' to the old ones. Few will be lucky enough to be able to make a real-world comparison. The guitar is fulsome in volume for its size but there's a certain shrillness to the upper mids that sounds almost Asian rather than European. With a thumbpick the result is a lively, bright, funky tone – okay for blues/ragtime, and again, it's loud for the body size. Bare fingers reveal a nasal bottom end plus slightly hollow, Martin-like trebles. With a pick, the sound seems modern to us – glassy and overtoney, with ample sustain. New strings and relatively little playing-in are naturally factors, and there is a sense of depth underneath the sound that suggests there may be some improvement in the future.

VERDICT

No other production guitar offers these features: a unique and attractive body profile, tasty rope binding, a deep vee-shaped neck, a high-radius fingerboard, the unusual (if ungainly) combination of a 14-fret neck on a 12-fret body. Timbers are good, and so is the finish and the standard of build. However, many buyers will be weighing it against a Style 18 Martin, a UK-made 000 or a mint used US small-shop guitar. At this price level it's all about the sound – and, let's face it, either big-brand pride or the benefits of a local luthier's custom service – and in neither of these terms does the Maurer quite add up.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	17/20
Playability	14/20
Sound	15/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**77%**

Good for... **standing out from the pack with an old-time look and, to an extent, an old-time feel**

Look elsewhere... **for a warmer, more subtle tone and better value for money**

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Premium Solid Top
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Genuine Abalone Purfling and Rosette
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First Impressions

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Price: £327

The Squier Vintage Modified line expands with an all-maple Precision and a maple-fingerboard Jazz Bass that recall the much-maligned 1970s. Review by Gareth Morgan

Squier

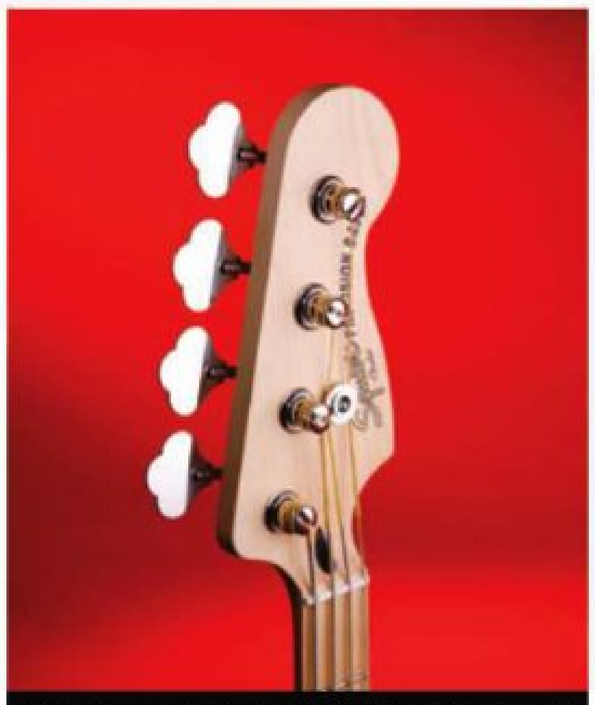
Vintage Modified Precision & Vintage Modified Jazz Bass '77

From the sought-after JV (Japanese Vintage) range of 1982-'84 to the Classic Vibes of today, Squiers have crossed over from start-up instruments to the professional sphere. They introduced the Vintage Modified replicas in 2006, and this month we've got two of a triumvirate of new models for review: the Vintage Modified Precision and the Vintage Modified Jazz Bass '77.

VM PRECISION

No need to outline the P-bass concept: let's get down to it. The body is a well-matched four-piece affair with a natural finish that reveals some very appealing grain. Where the previous Olympic White-finished VM P-bass was made from agathis, this one has a maple body, giving it a very classy look. It does weigh a little more than an average alder-body Precision, but at just over 4kg/8.8lbs it's perfectly reasonable. A three-ply black/white/black plastic pickguard carries two dome-type Tele knobs for volume and tone and surrounds a single Duncan Designed PB-101 split single-coil pickup with Alnico V magnets. The bridge is a typically flimsy-looking four-saddle type.

The neck is made from a single piece of maple with a comfortable modern C profile and a polyurethane finish (the olympic white model has a rosewood fingerboard – the standard issue on early '60s models). As with all basic Precision basses, the hardware is chrome finished and features standard open-gear tuners with large, friendly buttons.



Squier logo and headstock-end truss rod aside, the VM Precision has an authentic P-Bass look... and feel

The Duncan Designed PB-101 has a vintage-type output with cast Alnico V polepieces. It suits the VMP well

The VM Precision has plenty of bottom with lively harmonics. It's not as rich as the genuine article, but it sounds like you'd expect a P-Bass to sound

SOUNDS

All of the Squiers we've reviewed have been winners in the sound department, and the VM P-Bass carries on the tradition. There's lots of bottom end with plenty of lively, edgy harmonics. Further up the neck the scale tips towards a

FACTFILE

VM PRECISION

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in Indonesia

Price: £327

Build: Four-piece soft maple body, bolt-on maple neck with poly finish and 20 frets on a maple fingerboard. Standard open-gear tuners and four-saddle bridge. Chrome hardware

Electrics: Passive with one Duncan Designed PB-101 split single-coil pickup, one volume and one tone control

Left hander: No

Finishes: Amber maple and olympic white (with rosewood fingerboard)

Range Options: None

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:
Nut 41mm
12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
12th fret 22mm

String spacing:
Nut 11.5mm
Bridge 19.5mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 4.15kg/9.1lbs

Contact: Fender
01342 331 700
www.squierguitars.com

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**88%**

Good for... That Precision feel on a budget

Look elsewhere... For more tonal variation – but then maybe you should be playing another bass

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Price: £351

FACTFILE

VM JAZZ BASS '77

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in Indonesia

Price: £351

Build: Agathis body, bolt-on maple neck with poly finish and 20 frets on a maple fingerboard. Standard open-gear tuners and four-saddle bridge. Chrome hardware

Electrics: Passive with two Duncan Designed JB-101 single-coil Jazz Bass pickups. Two volumes and one tone control

Left hander: No

Finishes: Black only

Range Options: none

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:
Nut 37mm
12th fret 56mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 19.5mm
12th fret 22mm

String spacing:
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 4.5kg/9.9lbs

Contact: Fender
01342 331 700
www.squierguitars.com

Again, the Duncan JB-101 pickups are wound to fairly moderate specs and come with Alnico V slugs

Open-geared elephant-ear tuners do a fine job. Nut width is the regulation narrow 37mm Jazz Bass type

Black with a black guard is a very '70s look, and at 9.9lbs this agathis-bodied Vintage Modified Jazz has a 1970s-style weight as well

thuddy low/mid bias. Highs are full and clean while the D and G strings are full without being brittle. It's a traditional sound, without modern cut and bite; if you attack this bass with vigour you still get a feeling of slight treble compression. Back off the tone control and the snarl gradually disappears, eventually leading to a woolly and indistinct rumble. You do get the feeling that the Squier's sound is maybe not as rich as a good example of the genuine article but, in truth, the VM Precision sounds pretty much exactly as you'd expect a P-Bass to sound.

VM JAZZ '77

Made in Indonesia, like the VM P, the VM Jazz '77 attempts to recreate a Jazz Bass from 'the age of funk and the dawn of punk,' as Squier puts it. Black with a black guard is a very late-'70s Fender look, and at 4.5kg/9.9lbs this agathis-bodied bass has a '70s-style weight as well. Another period touch: numbered black plastic Strat-style knobs, which were indeed fitted to Jazz Basses in 1977. We think they're cool, and they make favourite settings easy to remember and redial.

The one-piece C-profile maple neck is authentically edge-bound and carries chunky white pearloid position markers. You could argue that the block inlays get a little lost in the blondness of the maple fingerboard, but it's a touch that adds a good deal to the VMJ '77's look. Tuners and bridge are the Standard versions found on the VM Precision.

When it comes to the pickups, modifications are afoot. Squier Jazzes of the recent past such as the Classic Vibe models featured custom single-coils, but these are the same as found on the basic VMJ models, namely two Duncan Designed JB101 single-coils. The controls – two volumes and a master tone – remain unaltered.

SOUNDS

In twin pickup mode the VM Jazz gives more of a thud and less of a growl than you'd expect. In Jazz Bass terms it feels a little under-cooked, and the highs aren't as snappy as they could be. A slight surplus of high-mids in this twin-pickup mix gives a slightly uneven result, and the low output lacks the bravura you'd associate with a great Jazz. It's still a decent noise and reasonably versatile, but this is something that approaches the classic sound as opposed to being a really good take on the real thing.

The neck pickup is a different story, with bags of weighty thud and a raspy growl in the lower registers... and it's very rocky if you cut the treble back to 6 or 7. The bridge pickup has a nice even output, with lows that snarl in a slightly restrained manner, a midrange with a touch of the expected burp and a hint of nasal edge on the thinner strings. If you don't like this then you can dial out its worst effects via the tone control without losing too much in the way of definition.

VERDICT

If you're not bothered about the Fender badge and just want a good, solid-sounding Precision or Jazz Bass, this pair of Squiers should be added to your viewing list. The '77 Jazz is decent; not quite as good as the Precision, but its extra-handsome looks may seduce many a budding Fender fan, and it's well-priced and well put together. The VM Precision is really rather good, with an appealing finish, excellent playability and a competitive asking price. We like it.

THE COMPETITION

BASS COLLECTION
Jive Bass

It was our sub-£1000 bass in Gear Of The Year for 2010. What more can we say?

RRP: £295

BASS COLLECTION
Precision Bass

An excellent, affordable rendition of the classic P-bass. Good looks, good sounds

RRP: £295

FENDER
American Standard Jazz or Precision Bass

The real deal – but at three times the price, we're definitely not talking budget

RRP: Both £975

FINAL SCORE

Build quality	18/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**84%**

Good for... a reasonable approximation of the Jazz Bass sound

Look elsewhere... for something a bit closer to the real deal

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First Impressions

Neat, tidy and light – just what you need for a home amp

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Price: £69.99

If you're starting out or need something to practice through without firing up your gig rig, then Kustom has a couple of contenders that might do the trick. Review by Gareth Morgan

Kustom

KB1 10W & KB20 20W Bass Combos

Kustom was founded in 1966 in Chanute, Kansas by Bud Ross. The original amps and cabs were clothed in gaudy, sparkly naugahyde, a fabric used for automotive upholstery. Equally colourfully, Ross – a compulsive gambler – eventually lost the company in a poker game. Kustom's current incarnation has been with us since 2005, and the whole line has a much more staid look. This month we're looking at a pair of budget-priced bass practice combos.

KB1

'Bookshelf' is a term often used for a certain size of hi-fi speaker, and it could just as well be applied to combos like the KB1. Kustom describe it as 'a small amp for practicing at home or on the road', so massive volume and a huge tone is obviously not on the agenda.

This modest little Chinese-made cube stands at 305mm high, 273mm wide, 152mm deep and weighs a trifling 4.5kg/9.9lbs. The rear-ported box is solidly made of 18mm chipboard covered in black vinyl, with plastic corner protectors, rubber feet and a plastic carry handle on top. There's a cloth speaker grille and a funky Kustom badge, behind which lies a solitary 6" Kustom speaker that should comfortably deal with the 10W coughed up by this little cutie.

The controls are dead simple. As well as Volume, there's a three-band EQ with a hefty 15dB of cut or boost available from Bass (60Hz), Mid (500Hz) and Treble (10kHz). To emphasise the KB1's practising role, you also get Aux In for CD/MP3 player connectivity and a Headphone Out, both of the mini jack variety.

All you really need for solo practice: volume, bass, middle, treble and a headphones socket

The modestly-sized Kustom KB1 is good for practice situations where you want a decent sound without making too much noise

SOUNDS

The question is not really how loud this little amp is, but whether it gives a decent enough sound to encourage you to pick up a bass and play. We first plugged in some headphones, and the KB1 gives

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Versatility	15/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**82%**

Good for... **Low level practising where portability and size are issues**

Look elsewhere... **For a little more bottom end or more variation in sound**

FACTFILE

KB1

Description: 10W bass combo with one Kustom 6" speaker in an 18mm chipboard cabinet with rear porting. Made in China

Price: £69.99

Controls: Volume, Bass, Mid and Treble controls, Input jack socket, AUX In and Headphones mini jack sockets

Range Options: see below

Contact: JHS
0113 2865381
www.jhs.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

ASHDOWN
Tourbus 10 10W combo
Sounds good and the EQ is simple and effective
RRP: £48

MARSHALL
MB15 15W combo
A strictly home practicing and recording unit by the UK's best-known amp name
RRP: £80

KUSTOM
KBA 16X JM 16W combo
Disturbed's John Moyer signature model offers a smidge more power and cool graphics
RRP: £139

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Bass Amp Review

Price: £139

FACTFILE

KB20

Description: 20W bass combo with one Kustom 12" speaker in a sealed 18mm chipboard cabinet. Made in China

Price: £139

Controls: Volume, Bass, Lo-Mid, Lo-Mid and Treble controls, Input 1 and Input 2 jack sockets, Aux In and Headphones mini jack sockets

Range Options: KB100 100W 1x15" combo, £249

Contact: JHS
0113 2865381
www.jhs.co.uk

a clean, clear sound with plenty of bottom. Aurally, this combo also does a decent enough job... but with a high-powered active bass, don't boost the bass EQ on the instrument as the starting point will be distorted and unpleasant.

With bass flat, the KB1 comfortably handles a B-string. Dialling in Middle gives a burpy, snappy, funky sound; keep the volume level down and you can add just enough bass EQ to fatten the impact before distortion sets in. You get plenty of cut and bite from the 6" speaker so boosting treble isn't really necessary for basic stuff, but if you want to try it, you'll find a nice extra sparkle. The KB1 is likely to be too lively for most people without venturing anywhere near the treble knob, and the best solution is to cut treble by at least a quarter. That'll get you a softer, smoother tone; if you find this too lifeless, boost Mid by the same amount. The result is still smooth but more sharply defined with only a vague hint of clanky fret noise.

KB20

The KB1's big sister is directed at louder solo practicing or ultra low-level rehearsing. Even though it only offers an extra 10W, this 18mm chipboard box is 495mm high, 394mm wide and 305mm deep, so it's set up to produce a much bigger sound. The KB20 has a 12" Kustom driver and weight is a reasonable 14.3kg/31.5lbs. Though the control panel looks simple, this time there's a four-band EQ, with Bass (+/- 14dB @ 60Hz) and Treble (+/- 15dB @10kHz) separated by Lo-Mid (+/- 12dB @340Hz) and Hi-Mid (+/- 10dB @2kHz). The KB20 has the KB1's Aux In and Headphones mini jacks plus there's another handy feature – two inputs which can be used simultaneously, providing your lazy guitar-playing buddy with an excuse not to lug an amp to rehearsal.

SOUNDS

Naturally, the KB20 delivers more volume and a bigger sound, and that 12" speaker is a less spiky customer. The sound quality is pretty pleasing. Again, the same caveat relating to an active bass EQ applies, but take care with your onboard controls and you'll get a rich, full-range sound with growling lows and natural-sounding highs. If you fancy more punch, you can boost the bass EQ safely up to around a quarter; this gives a noticeable increase in thud and a bit more warmth. Another method is to add up to half boost of low mid, which gives improved definition for bottom-end, root-oriented parts.

Boosting high mid produces a more vibrant sound with a pleasing crunch and shifts the emphasis to higher frequencies, allowing recourse to the KB20's bass EQ. Taking both controls to half boost provides a good mix of width and brightness. As with the KB1, upping the treble knob will be a rare event, but it's good for slap excursions.

VERDICT

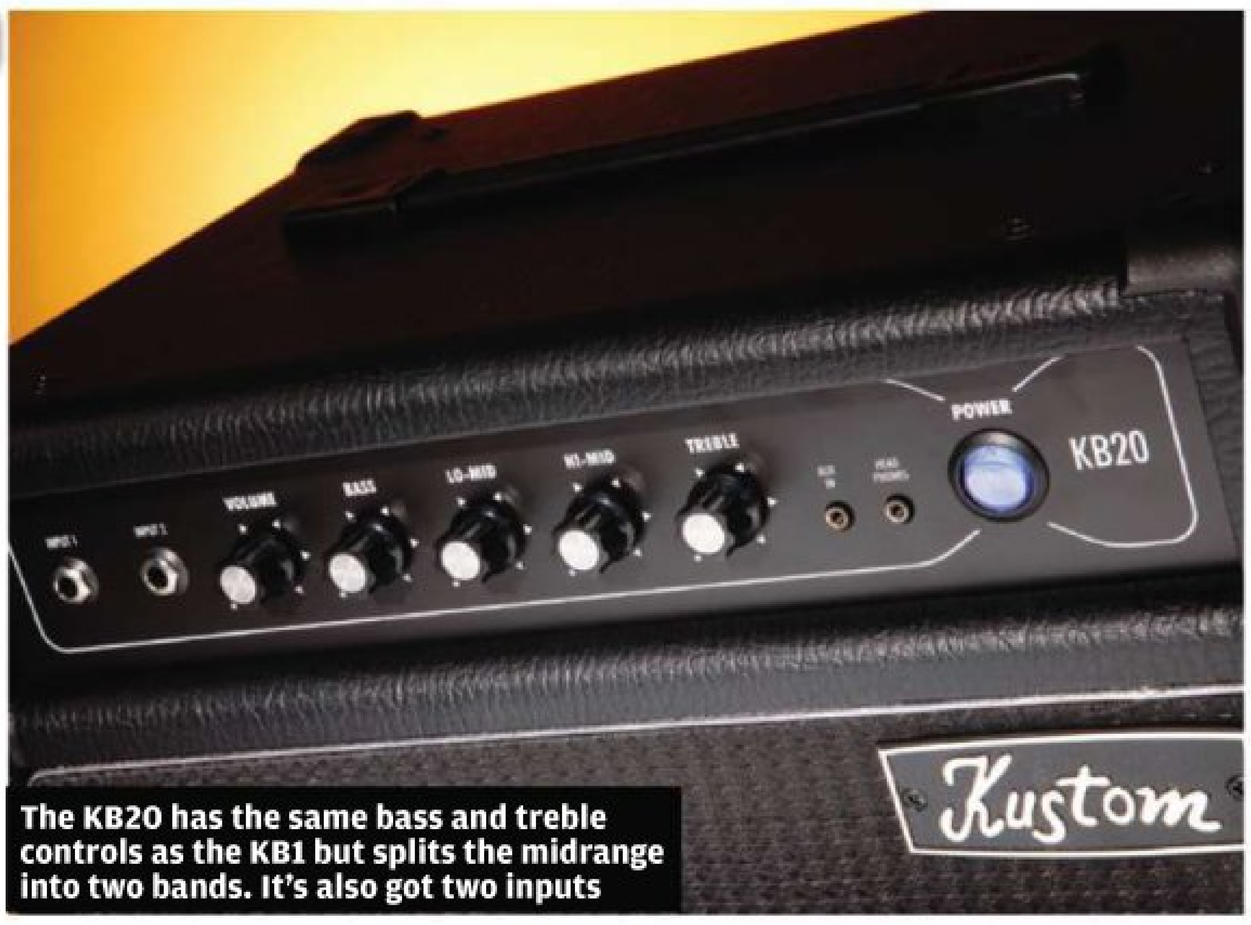
It's important to bear in mind the purpose of these little Kustoms. Neither provides a stack of power or earth-shaking lows, and while the KB20 might just cope on a gig where every other instrument is totally unamplified, gigging amps they aren't: they're practice combos, and pretty decent ones at that. The KB1 is good for low-level practising, the kind of situation where you need a decent basic tone without making too much noise. The KB20 is a little harder to pigeonhole, but it offers a wider variety of sounds and is better suited to basic jamming or rehearsing without a drum kit. They're well put together with nothing superfluous in the way of features – and the prices are reasonable.

THE COMPETITION

ARIA
AB-50 50W combo
An impressive low-level rehearsal combo with a surprisingly high quality EQ
RRP: £199

MARKBASS
Micromark 50W combo
Incredible size to power ratio and superb sounds, but the price is restrictive
RRP: £369

PIGNOSE
Hog 30 30W combo
Nice combination of portability and quality of sound from this battery-powered belter
RRP: £259.95



The KB20 has the same bass and treble controls as the KB1 but splits the midrange into two bands. It's also got two inputs

The KB20 still isn't up to gigging, but it offers a wider variety of sounds and is better suited to basic jamming or rehearsing without a drumkit

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	15/20
TOTAL	**81%**

Good for... A clean-sounding, honest amp for practising or low level rehearsing

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Remember the Ashbory? This mini-bass will be loved by uke orchestras everywhere

Kala

U-Bass

RRP: £365

A bass? Built on a baritone ukulele body? With our reputation? You've got to be joking. But no – this little bass uke, designed by Kala and Owen Holt of Road Toad Music – may be diddy but it's definitely no joke.

The U-Bass looks like a pint-sized Spanish guitar. It can be tuned to E, A, D and G in the same octave as a standard bass thanks to its thick black proprietary polyurethane strings. It may not be loud, and the strings have a slippery feel that takes some getting used to, but the thuddy tone is really convincing.

Made in China and weighing a paltry 1kg/2.2lbs, the U-Bass has a mahogany neck, laminated mahogany back and sides and a spruce top (there's an all-mahogany version for £80 more). The rosewood fingerboard carries 16 narrow nickel frets (there's a fretless version available, too). The strings terminate in oversized black tuners on the headstock – those stretchy strings make tuning an unusual experience – and at the other end there's a rosewood bridge which conceals a passive Shadow pickup system with individual piezo elements in the saddles.

SOUNDS

It may take a little time to get used to the tiny 20" scale length, but when you do there's a lot of fun to be had. The polyurethane strings become a pleasure to play and deliver a sound that's rich, warm and surprisingly fat. It heads in the direction of the acoustic woodiness we associate with its more substantial distant cousin, but you could definitely use it for many more retro applications than just jazz.

VERDICT

Once you get past viewing the U-Bass as a toy, you'll realise there are a wealth of uses for it. It may just be the perfect bass for guitarists who want to dabble in the lower frequencies.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	17/20
Sound	17/20
Value for Money	18/20
Vibe	20/20
TOTAL	**91%**

Good for... Getting close to the upright sound in miniature – and having loads of fun

Look elsewhere... For a full-range bass sound.... but that's missing the point entirely

Contact: Sutherland Trading 02920 887 333
Web: www.sutherlandtrading.com

Micro-sized guitar interface for the iPhone with added effects capability

Peavey

iAmpkit Link

RRP: £29.99

If you're beginning to regret buying that 100W head and 4x12" cab that takes up half a room in your house and quietly mocks you every time you pass, then maybe it's time to go for something smaller... a lot smaller. In fact, how about making it practically invisible and able to fit in your pocket? What sorcery is this? Well, those clever bods at Peavey have gone and shrunk a few amps and effects into an iPhone app, and built a connector about the same size as a Zippo lighter. It's all a bit *Fantastic Voyage*, but with less Raquel Welch.

The Ampkit Link itself is an unassuming white box with a jack input and two mini-jack outputs for the iPhone and your headphones/speakers. By itself it does rather little, but once you download the Amplink app from iTunes you've got lots to play with. There's a free 'taster' version that features one amp and a couple of pedals, or the Ampkit+ (£11.99) which has an expanded palette. Alongside a good range of tones and effects (including distortion, fuzz and echo) there are backing tracks to jam along to, a recording feature for working on song parts, and the ability to buy further pedals and amps from the in-app store.

Another bonus is that the Link works with other app software such as the impressive AmpliTube.

VERDICT

For practicing, writing, or using when travelling the Peavey Ampkit is an excellent choice. The tones are good, the interface is clean and easy to work out, and the option to record or jam adds a level of practicality that some of its rivals lack. For less than the price of a pedal, this really is a steal.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	17/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for Money	19/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**90%**

Good for... General practicing and writing

Look elsewhere... You'd be pretty brave to walk onstage with one of these

Contact: Peavey 01536 461234
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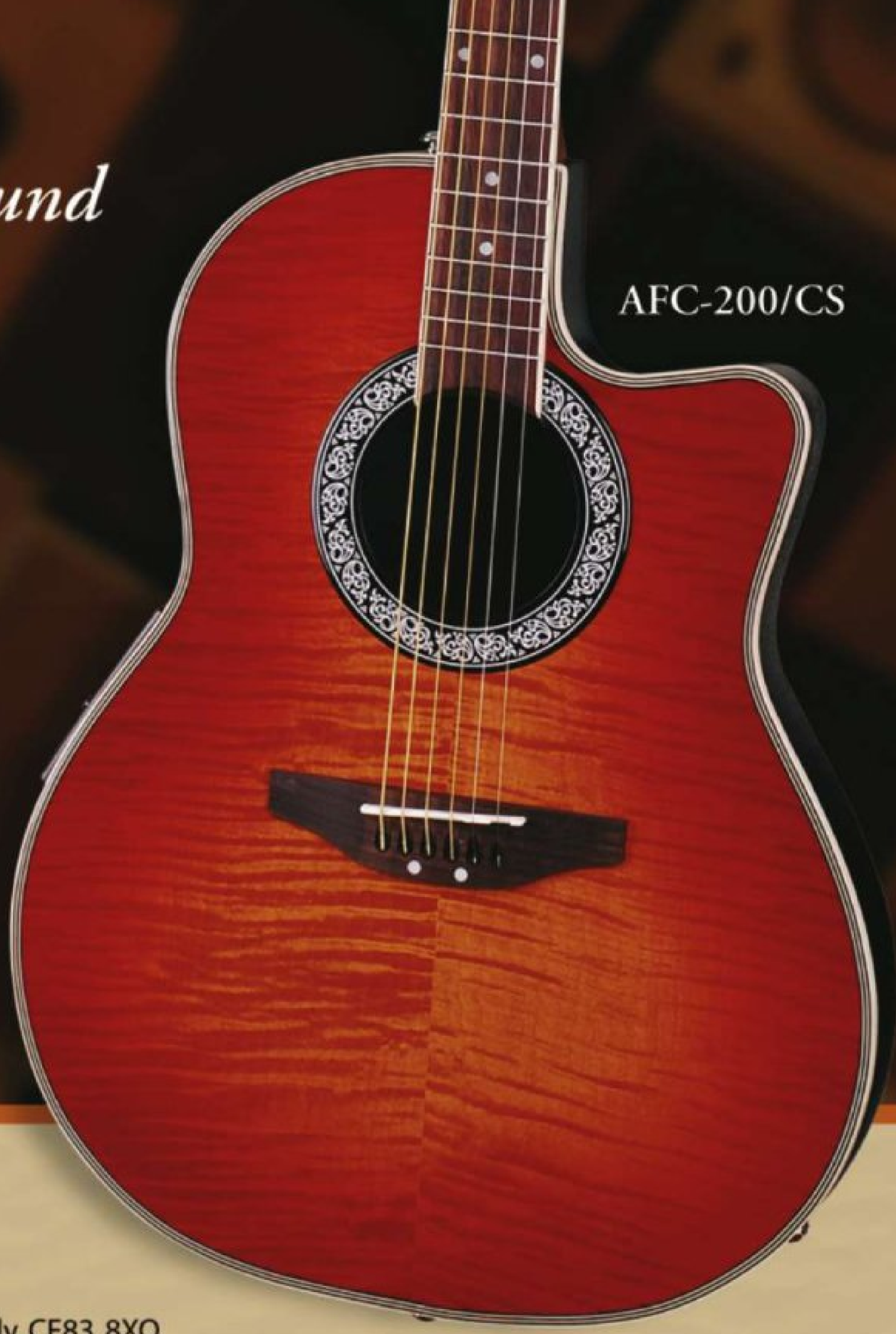

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Back To Basics

Maybe the big bubble has burst on the vintage market, but that doesn't mean it's all over. If you're playing the long game, thinks Phil Harris, and keep an eye on the classics and great players, you might do just fine

As much as we all love the weird and wacky when it comes to old gear, there's no getting away from the fact that the vintage market was created – and is kept going – by the main models. When it comes to electrics, you're talking about the Fender Stratocaster, the Gibson Les Paul, the Fender Telecaster and the Gibson ES-335. And as for acoustics, it's dear ol' Martins.

Tough economic conditions have caused prices to fall on a lot of high-end vintage instruments in the last three years. Many people have been put off, but there are some smart people out there who realise that now is precisely the right time to buy a first-class vintage guitar. I started out in the '70s when there were relatively few collectors (a lot of guitars weren't that old then) and had a lot of success in the '80s buying instruments from people who thought the whizzy, often pointy, guitars that were in fashion at the time were going to be the future – so I know the market is always going to be cyclical. However, what hasn't really changed is the chart positions of the big models: Strats, Les Pauls and the like were the big boys when I started out, and that's not going to change.

1959 Les Paul Standards were fetching £200,000 three years ago. Now they're £120,000. That's a hell of a discount

So for people looking to start collecting, your safest bet is to head for the mainstream and think about playing the long game. For example, 1959 Les Paul Standards were fetching £200,000 all day long three years ago. Now you can get one for £120,000. That's a hell of a discount. And the thing is that in the next three years it'll go back to that price and kick on from there. If I had £100,000 in cash now I'd spend it all on guitars and look for them to be worth £150,000 in three years. If that wasn't the case, then I'm Rudolph Nureyev.

If you haven't got that kind of silly money to spend, there are still wonderful instruments out there waiting to be picked up. An old Strat in good condition with original parts is going to be nice little earner for you as the years go by, even if it's not a superstar model or year.

We're about to go into the specifics of each model in a minute, but before I go, a word of warning: before you hand over your money, make sure you do as much research as you can to ensure you're buying exactly what the vendor claims to be selling. Wherever possible get expert advice (pay for it if you have to). And if in doubt, walk away from the purchase no matter how hard it might be. Take it from one who knows; you might miss out on some life lessons, but I'd prefer you to have a fine guitar that's also a good investment.

1963 Fender Stratocaster

This is a fiesta red refin, but it's a refin done a long time ago, and all the other parts are original. This is worth around £6000, which is less than the £8000 to £10,000 you'd pay for one with an original sunburst finish in the same condition. Having something like a refin done is fine if that's reflected in the price and you're told about it when you buy it. If the sound and feel are there, you'll still have plenty of interested buyers; at these kind of prices you'll often find there's a bigger market than at the top end. More buyers usually leads to increased prices, making this kind of guitar a sound investment

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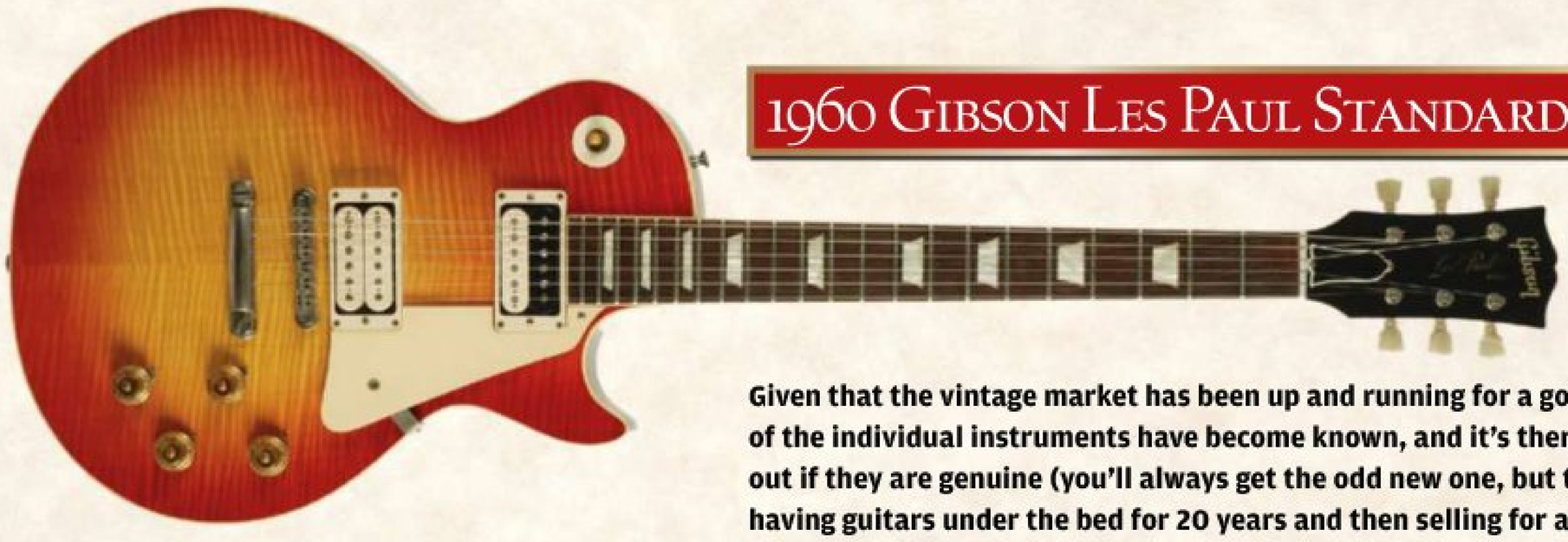
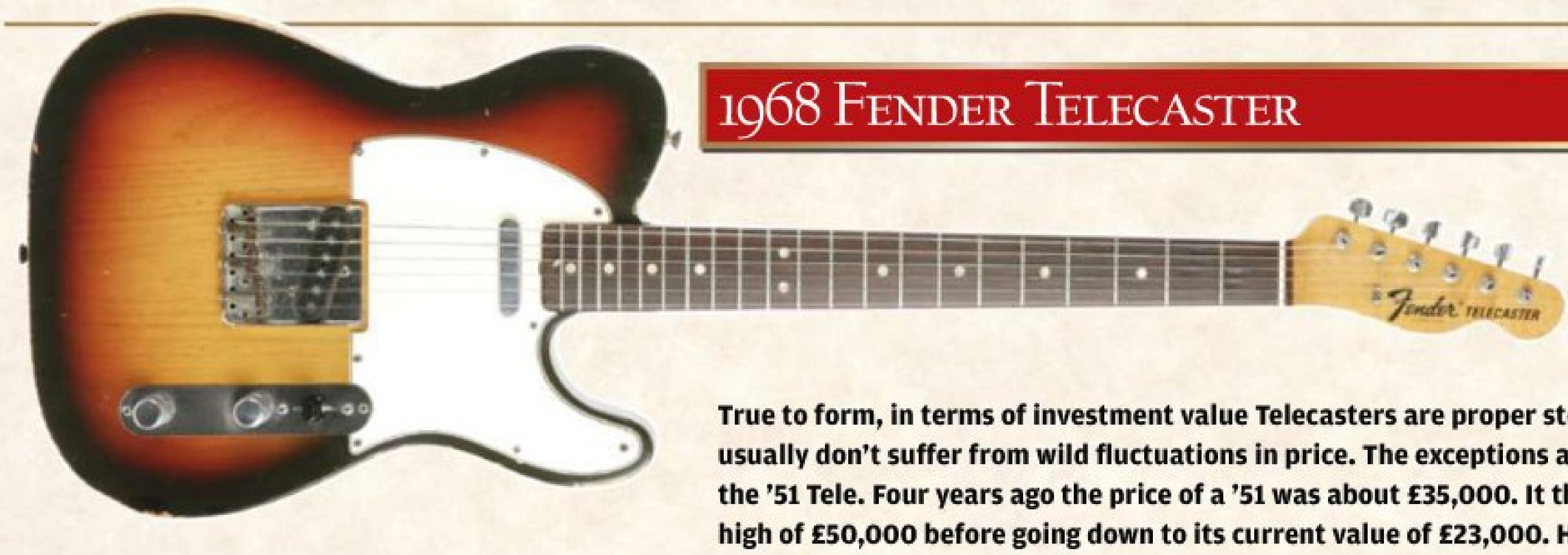
Hooked on Classics



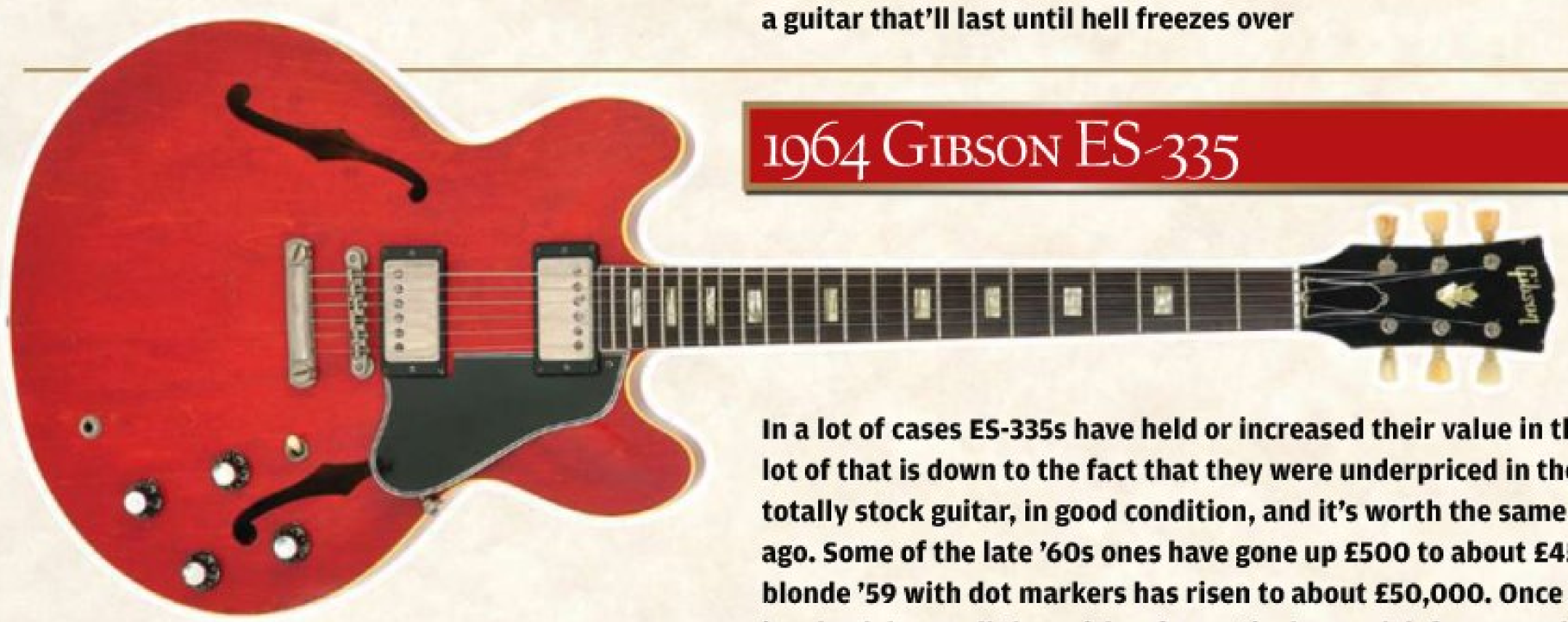
1960 Gibson Les Paul Standard

Given that the vintage market has been up and running for a good few years now, a lot of the individual instruments have become known, and it's therefore easier to work out if they are genuine (you'll always get the odd new one, but the days of people having guitars under the bed for 20 years and then selling for a pittance are gone). This guitar has been featured in the *Ultimate Guitar Book* and has a well-documented history. As before, it's worth less than three years ago – about £60,000 to be precise – but the price will creep up. Not only that, but it's a wonderful guitar to play



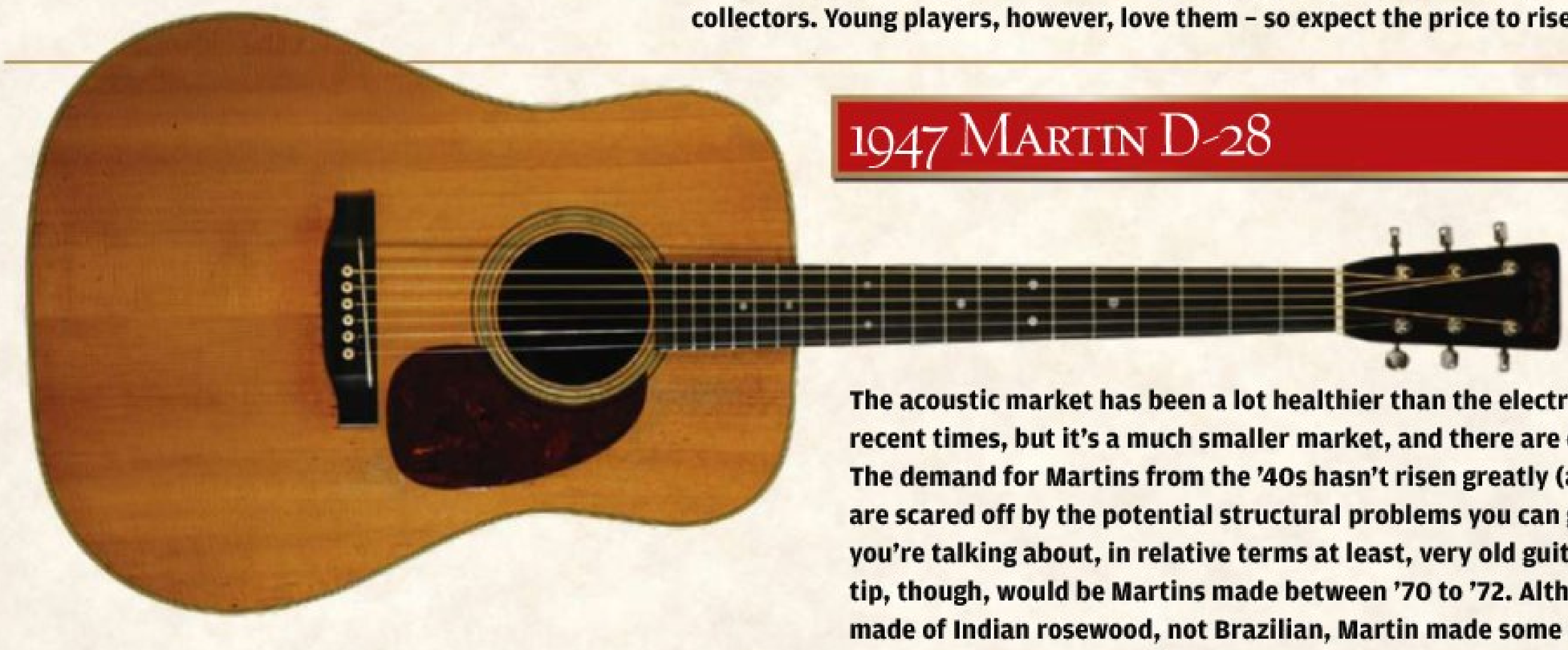
1968 Fender Telecaster

True to form, in terms of investment value Telecasters are proper steady Eddies that usually don't suffer from wild fluctuations in price. The exceptions are things such as the '51 Tele. Four years ago the price of a '51 was about £35,000. It then went up to a high of £50,000 before going down to its current value of £23,000. However, when you're talking about late '60s models, four years ago they cost approximately £2500 to £3000. Now? About £3500... and certainly no less than £3000. And for that, you'll have a guitar that'll last until hell freezes over



1964 Gibson ES-335

In a lot of cases ES-335s have held or increased their value in the past few years, and a lot of that is down to the fact that they were underpriced in the first place. This is a totally stock guitar, in good condition, and it's worth the same £8500 it was four years ago. Some of the late '60s ones have gone up £500 to about £4500. At the top end, a blonde '59 with dot markers has risen to about £50,000. Once again, if you're getting involved, learn all the quirks of a particular model: for example, late '50s models with original Bigsbys have gone down in price because they aren't prized by the older collectors. Young players, however, love them – so expect the price to rise in a decade



1947 Martin D-28

The acoustic market has been a lot healthier than the electric one in recent times, but it's a much smaller market, and there are exceptions. The demand for Martins from the '40s hasn't risen greatly (a lot of people are scared off by the potential structural problems you can get when you're talking about, in relative terms at least, very old guitars). A good tip, though, would be Martins made between '70 to '72. Although they're made of Indian rosewood, not Brazilian, Martin made some excellent guitars in those years and they're an excellent investment for the price

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PRIVATE COLLECTION

Adventures In Stereo

Norman Mitchell's music shop bears witness to his passions: stereo guitars and matching guitar/amp sets. Lars Mullen is all ears

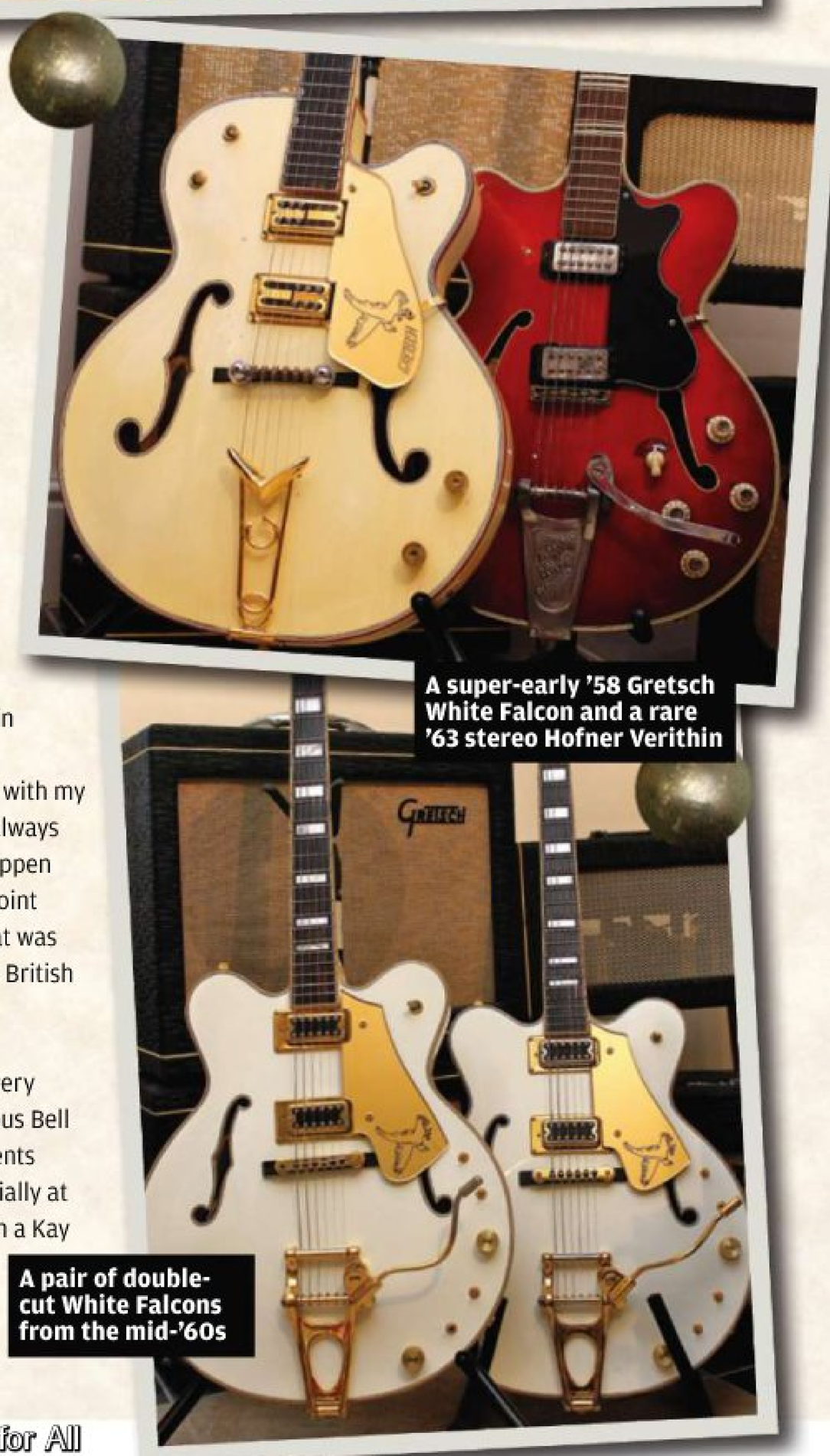
'I can't really describe what it's like to own a vintage guitar shop, especially if you have an affliction called GAS,' admits Norman Mitchell. In truth, Norman really doesn't need any therapy or treatment for his Guitar Acquisition Syndrome. He's fine as he is, not surprisingly, given his incredible collection of guitars and amps at Old Hat Guitars in Horncastle. His only worry is making sure that none of them are sold by mistake.

Norman is from the post-war baby boom generation. 'We were the ones who used to stare at all the glorious Hofners in the music shop windows in London – and we were the ones who sadly went away with a Rosetti Airstream III instead. That's exactly what I did in 1958,' he laughs. 'It was basically a green plank of wood with a bolt-on neck and a plastic scratchplate which contained the pickups. They were marketed by Rosetti but built by Egmond in Holland. I have several of them now!

'Trawling up and down Denmark Street with my friends was a big feature of my life. We'd always hope that something interesting would happen to us, as Denmark Street was the centre point of everything that was happening in the British music industry.

'I became hooked on stereo after hearing Tony Hicks with the Hollies, who had this big, fat sound'

'I also drooled longingly over every page of the famous Bell Musical Instruments catalogue, especially at the Kay guitars. I never did manage to own a Kay back then but I have a few these days, and I've got a lot of respect for them. I think Bell Music did us a great service



A super-early '58 Gretsch White Falcon and a rare '63 stereo Hofner Verithin

A pair of double-cut White Falcons from the mid-'60s

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when they started to import Kays. For what they cost, they were fabulous electric guitars. They were used by lots of worthy players, including Alexis Korner, and also Eric Clapton in his early days. As it turned out, though, instead of a Kay, I bought a Hofner.

'I've always loved stereo guitars and matching stereo amps, and one of my best Hofners is this rare '63 stereo Verithin. It took me 12 years to find one, and somebody had wired it back to mono, so I had to painstakingly restore it back to its original layout.

'I became hooked on stereo after hearing Tony Hicks with the Hollies, who had this big, fat sound. I was fascinated by the extra capability that could be achieved with stereo. Had stereo guitars not been so expensive when the idea first surfaced, I think a lot more players would have used them onwards into the '60s.

'The first true stereo guitars were launched in 1958. Gibson and Gretsch both experimented with them at about the same time, and I wouldn't like to say who was first to get the ball rolling. Gretsch guitars were marketed by a guy called Jimmy Webster who went on the road with a Gretsch Project-O-Sonic stereo system and demonstrated their first stereo guitar, which was a White Falcon – I've got a wonderful '58 prototype. Also available in stereo were the Country Club and Anniversary models. I have several Country Clubs and about a dozen White Falcons, but I've yet to find a Double Anniversary Stereo.

'My two mid-'60s stereo double cut White Falcons have second generation pickups, and by this time the system had become a little more sophisticated. A switch offered a choice of bass or treble amps, or both together.

Two late '50s Country Clubs by Gretsch

Above, left to right: a Gibson stereo 335 prototype and three ES-345TDs from '65, 1967 and 1970

Two more ES-345s: a black one from the mid-'70s and a '97 in cherry with stoptail

'I've also got two late '50s stereo Country Clubs. The blond one arrived as a basket case and took over two years to restore with salvaged bits. I rewound the pickups and even had some parts tooled up in my workshop. The other one is a sunburst with a fairly unusual figured top.

'I've also managed to complete the package with some of the matching stereo amps. The Gretsch Stereo King set consists of one stand-alone reverb and a unit with two amps in one case with a set of treble and bass speakers – the same system that Webster developed and demo'd.

'At the same time, Gibson produced their own stereo amp system that had speakers on the left and right of the cabinet, but I don't think it produced such a wide stereo sound. I don't think it's too much of a derisory statement to say that, at the time, Gretsch had the edge when it came to early stereo guitars and the amplified sound.'

Norman's stereo Gibsons are some of the cleanest examples you could hope to find. He has a fair few ES-345s – two immaculate tobacco sunburst models, one from 1965 and one from

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Below, a fine orange 1964 Gretsch Chet Atkins Nashville

Above, a 1958 Gibson Stereo-Vib combo. Below, the controls of the famous Magnatone 260

Right, a Hofner Diplomat (top), Committee (left) and unidentified three-pickup model with built-in effects

Top left, a Golden Hofner, a cutaway acoustic with DeArmond and yet another very cool Committee

1970, a red burst built in 1967, plus two more 1970s models, one in black and one in red. There's also a unique stereo ES-335 with a fine-tuning bridge which is actually a prototype Country Rock stereo. 'It was a retirement present from Gibson to the gentleman who drove the official Gibson motorhome around the USA, demonstrating the guitars. I bought it from his son, who was concerned it should go to someone who would appreciate the history. The maple top and metal nut give it a really bright sound. It's in fabulous condition... I don't think it was ever played.'

You will be less than astonished to learn that Norman has squirrelled away some matching Gibson stereo amps. Pride of place goes to a '58 Gibson Stereo-Vib combo that has been lovingly restored in his workshop. 'The chassis and control panel cleaned up beautifully, and we managed to recover it with a material that's very close to the original,' he details. 'With all these amps, rather than rely on plug-in transformers, I have them hardwired with proper mains transformers for UK voltage.

'The Magnatone was the Cadillac of amplifiers, very expensive and sophisticated. Buddy Holly used to use one'

'Another gorgeous amp is the Magnatone Custom 260 High Fidelity. Try it with the double cut stereo Gretsch Chet Atkins Nashville – that takes some beating for sound. It was the Cadillac of American amplifiers, very sophisticated and expensive for the period. Buddy Holly used one. It was the only amp to have a true modulating vibrato; the note actually changes pitch rather than the volume just going up and down.'

Norman also has a passion for big-bodied semi-acoustics, even if some are mono. 'I have quite a few Hofner semis, which I adore,' he says. 'I have a Committee in almost perfect condition, and another from 1959 fitted with a pair of single coil pickups – it's the oldest one here.

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Left: rare '63 Epiphone Professional and matching amp, plus a '57 Emperor

A '55 Gretsch Country Club in Cadillac Green and a '56-'57 6120, plus an Electromatic Twin amp in tweed

I have another with a single floating DeArmond pickup which was also sold by Selmer, the Hofner distributors at the time. I have a Diplomat, which needed a lot of restoration work but plays and sounds wonderful now. I also have a three-pickup Hofner... the only trouble is, I'm not sure what it is. It's a Selmer-distributed model, as it has the treble clef on the headstock. I know it's rare, as it's active and has an onboard electronic reverb.

'The Golden Hofner was renowned as the company's high-end hollowbody electric. I think they only made about 22 in all. This one is a Thinline model and it used to belong to Graham Bonnet from Rainbow. It had been left and forgotten and once again arrived here as a bag of bits, so it's been restored from the ground up.'

Next up is a pair of seldom-seen Epiphone semi-acoustics – the first being an innovative Professional, with the controls of its matching dedicated amplifier manipulated via the guitar. 'It's a '63, and it's the rarest Epiphone I've got,' confirms Norman. 'It took an age to track it down.

'On the amp, the only operable devices are on/off and standby – everything else is located on the guitar. Apart from the normal volume and tone there are various forms of built-in presets including compression, tremolo and reverb. This set would have been extremely expensive in its day. The guitar itself plays remarkably well... it's got a really slim, comfortable neck.

'This '57 Epiphone Emperor is also quite rare. It's got the New York pickups and a "bikini" logo on the headstock. This is the same model that John Lee Hooker played for years. Not many guitars like this made it to the UK back then, although some arrived in dribs and drabs via visiting sailors. The American trade barrier was the reason why European makers like Hofner flourished so well. The first guitars from the USA were imported by Bell Musical Instruments. Four pence down, and four pence forever... those were the only terms that we could afford!'

And still the amazing guitar and amp sets keep coming. 'This Country Club guitar and amp package built in '55 is in remarkable condition,' says Norman. 'This colour is called Cadillac Green, and it's unusually dark. Like Fender, Gretsch used to borrow colours from the motor industry, notably the Dupont paint charts. The amp is a 6161 Electromatic Twin of the first generation, delivering about nine watts via two elliptical speakers. I also have a nice selection of very clean Gretsch Mk11 6161 amps which were upgraded with a built-in tremolo and had two elliptical speakers and one oval tweeter. I have them set up behind two Tennesseans from different eras. Most Gretsch amps were built by Valco and fitted with Jensen speakers.

'I don't know why two guitars can sound so different when they're technically the same. It's the snake oil factor'

'The 6161 amps were marketed at about the same time as the Vox AC30, but I personally think they sound far better. They were great amps and very ahead of their time, but they were swines to take out on gigs, as the fixed handles meant they wouldn't stack in the back of the van!

'A 6161 amp makes a great partner for my '63 Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman. You can see how Gretsch, after a failed attempt to stop feedback by binding the f-holes, actually filled them in, and offered painted-on f-holes with or without painted binding.'

Norman next appears with a genuinely rare classic. 'Now and again I come across a vintage guitar that almost re-writes the history books,' he says proudly. 'This '57 Gibson Switchmaster is loaded with three PAF pickups, but according to all the books a Switchmaster with these pickups shouldn't really have existed until '58.

'So it must be an early prototype, or a custom order. It was a birthday present to myself, and it's in exquisite condition... and so is the lovely old case. To think that Scotty Moore and Bill Haley both played one of these! But the Switchmasters were very shortlived as they were far too expensive, and Gibson were making some fabulous alternatives. I normally play this through a Rhythm King, but this Gibson Stereo-Vib combo – which delivers 30W mono or 15W in stereo – works well, and it's from the same year.

'A lot of these guitars have turned up in the strangest places, and I've I travelled far and wide to collect them. I don't really use eBay because of the risk factor. I also have many friends in Europe and the USA, so if I see something I really like I can call them up and say "Go fetch!" This Gibson ES-175 dates from '52 and was found in

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1963 Chet Atkins Country Gent and (top) Tennessean, both from the painted f-hole era

Rare Gibson '57 Switchmaster with PAFs and a Gibson Stereo-Vib

1952 Gibson ES-175 and a 1948 ES-150 amplifier

a wardrobe in Les Paul's hometown of Waukesha, Wisconsin. This is probably another example of a young eager guitar player who rushed out with his first pay packet, bought the whole package, and gave up after a week or two. It arrived here with its original lead and tuition book! It's a perfect partner for this Gibson ES-150 combo, which dates back to 1948. I've been lucky – after restoring these guitars to cosmetic near-perfection, they still seem to have the vintage vibe.

'I really don't know how to sum up why two guitars side by side can often sound so different when technically they are the same. In the shop we call it the snake oil factor. It could be down to whether the timber was grown in a wet environment or in a windy place where more compression was applied to the grain pattern... or maybe the guy building it had a great weekend or a big pay packet. It's impossible to quantify.

'We have a massive selection of vintage guitars and amps here at Old Hat Guitars, and my collection is dotted around within the stock... as bait, really! Watch out, though, if one gets accidentally sold! I like to think my shop as being rather like a grown-up boys' club that does exactly what it says on the box.

'I don't think I'll ever stop collecting. Eventually I want to open a vintage guitar museum, and yes, there will be an admission charge, and all money made will go towards cancer research, something that's very close to my heart.'

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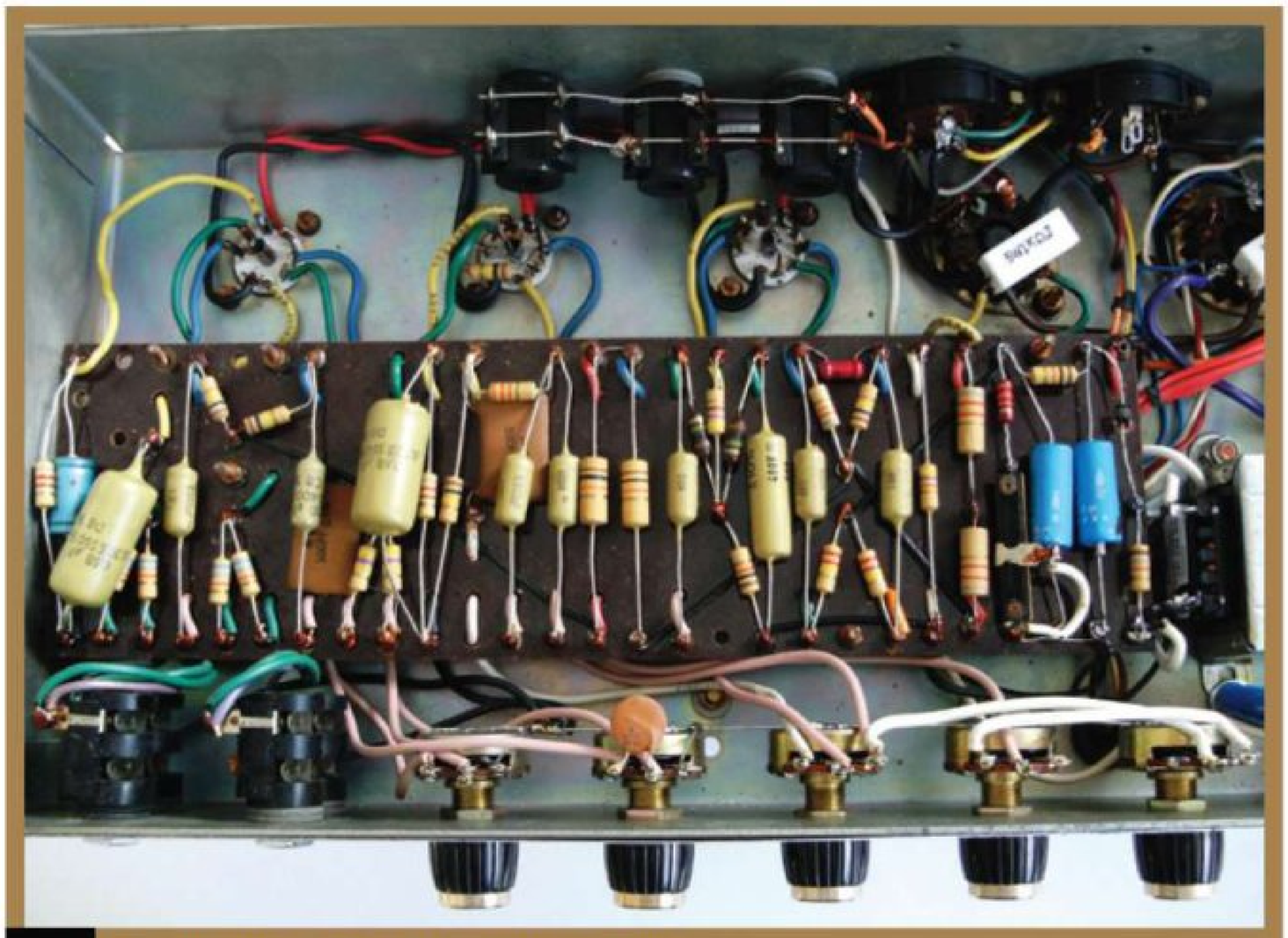
WIRED FOR SOUND: THE GREAT PCB DEBATE

If you use a valve amp, you'll know how much importance is attached to hardwiring. Hi-tech manufacturing is a must when it comes to keeping costs down... but why is it that our ears can hear the difference? Dave Petersen investigates

During the 1950s and '60s, when valve technology was standard in consumer goods, the cost of making a hand-wired amplifier was kept affordable by the low prices of valves and other components needed for the large-volume production of radios and televisions. Since then valves have disappeared from consumer goods, leaving music products – particularly guitar amps – as the main market.

Suddenly, good valves are expensive. In recent years prices have risen to several times their former level, and although this can be said of many other kinds of product, few can match the steep upward price curve of valves and their supporting components. The truth is this: with labour-intensive assembly procedures factored in, valve amp manufacturers are having difficulty keeping their products within reach of guitarists. There are solutions, and in this article we're going to examine them – while keeping an eye on the most important thing of all... the way amps sound.

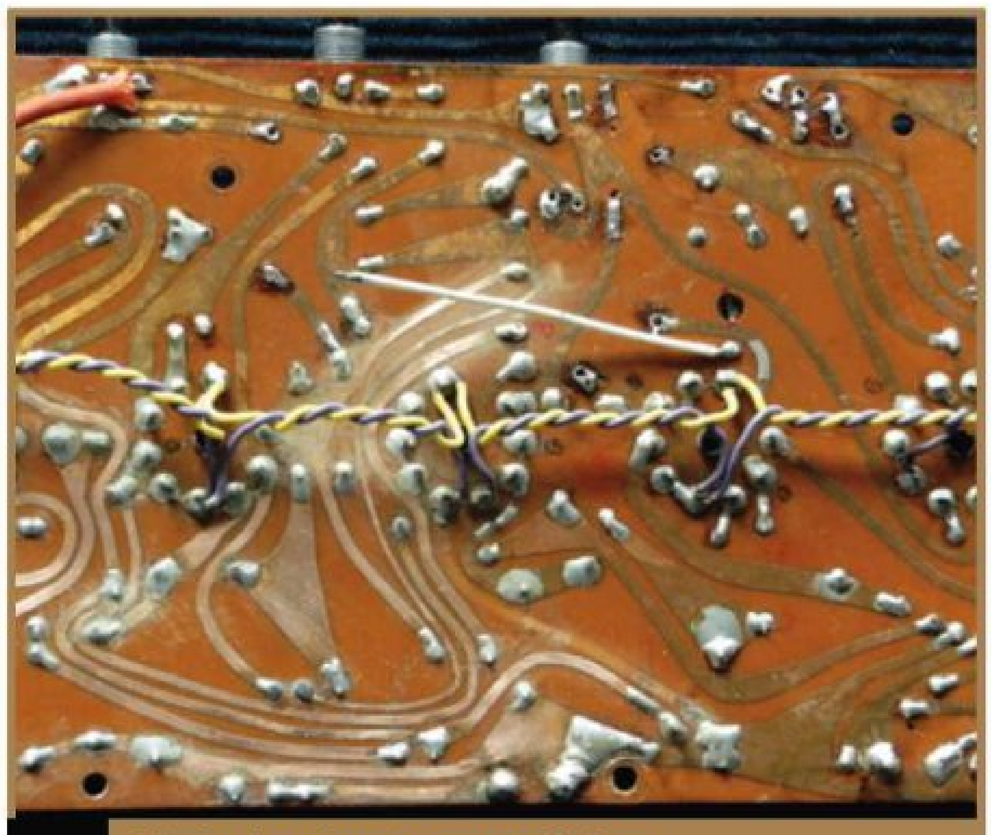


1 The sight that players love to see: classic old-style hardwiring in this 1970 Marshall 50 Super Lead

PCBs: THE ANSWER?

One way makers keep costs down is by using the assembly speed advantages of printed circuit boards (PCBs). PCBs are essential to all modern consumer electronics, and a valve amp made with them is significantly lower in price than an equivalent hardwired one **(Pic 1)**. This is because it takes about a quarter of the time to build, and there's another bonus – you get a more consistent product that's not likely to need much post-assembly quality control. For every 10 hand-wiring workers, there's a skilled technician whose job is to check wiring and correct errors, and this adds further to the cost of hardwired products.

Why then do hardwired amps still have a market, rather than simply leaving it to their more reasonably-priced PCB counterparts? Is there a discernible difference in sound quality? Many guitarists say there is, and this may account for the survival and the recent growth in sales of old-fashioned hardwired amps.



2 Old-school PCB layout. Some tracks have been brightened for the camera

TASTE THE DIFFERENCE

From an engineer's viewpoint, using conventional test methods, there's no measurable change between PCB and hardwired versions of the same model of amp in standard parameters like output, frequency response, noise and distortion. Induced hum – the bugbear of hardwired assemblies – is often lower in the PCB version, although this can vary with the PCB layout (indeed, some respected old valve amps used PCBs very early on without noticeable ill-effects). In others that transferred later to this technology the difference is apparent to the player, and that's useful in helping to determine what causes this impression.

The words 'to the player' are significant, because it's doubtful if it would be noticeable to the average listener. But ask a guitarist to comment on a hardwired amplifier and a later version of it made with PCBs and the answer will probably be that the amplifier 'feels' different.

SOFT TOUCH

Touch response – or how a guitar's strings respond to the player through an amp – is a difficult aspect of an amp to assess technically. It's governed by more than one factor, an important one being the amp's input impedance, which determines how much it loads the guitar's pickup. Equally important is group delay, the time taken for the magnified incoming signal to appear at the amp's output. Group delay is the sum of the transient responses (also called rise time or slew rate) of all the stages in the amp's signal chain. A difference of more than 10 microseconds is perceptible as a change in the touch response. A frequent comment of players checking out early digital modelling amps, whose group delay is inherently big because of the time needed to encode and

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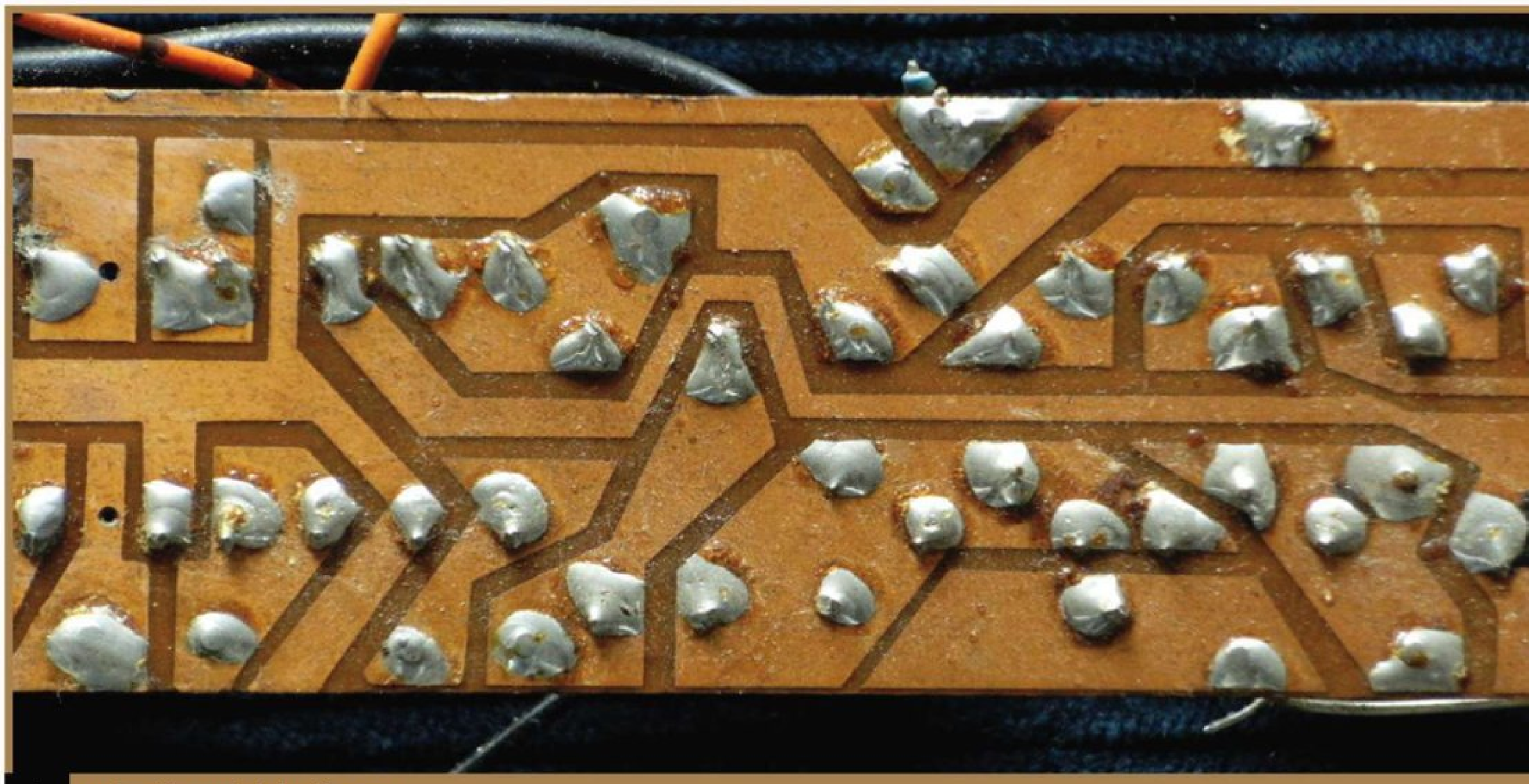


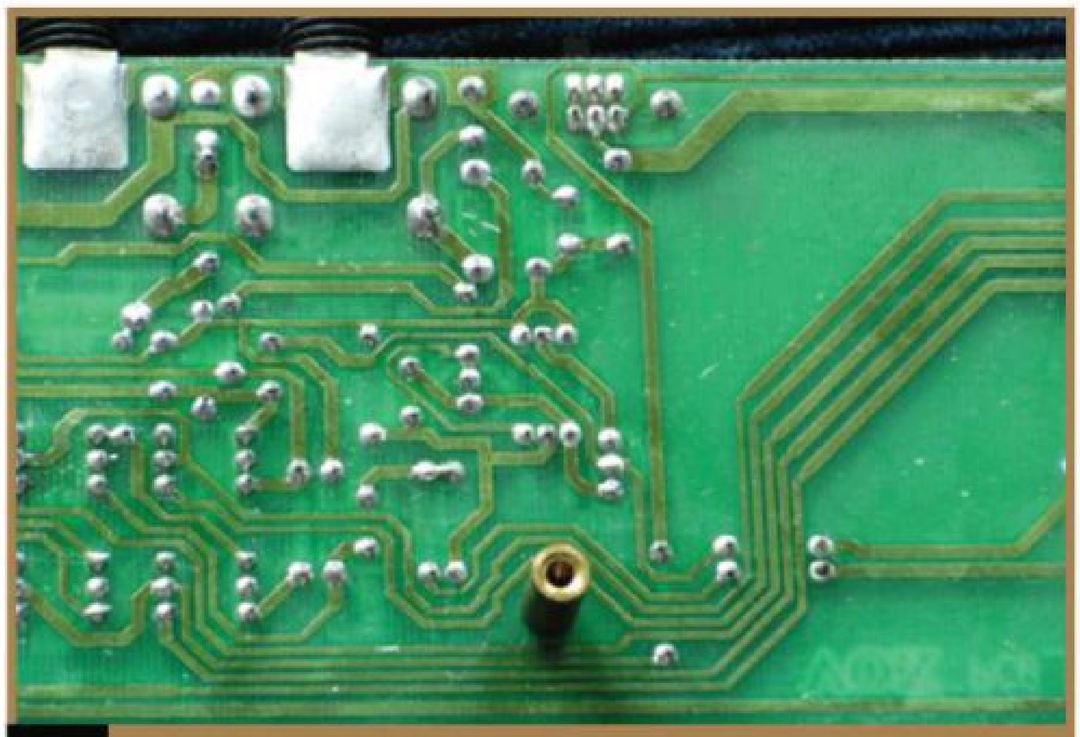
3 **Another older method of making PCBs. Note the absence of close parallel tracks**

decode the signal, was that their strings felt a gauge heavier. This is a worst-case example, and this type of amp has greatly improved recently, but it identifies the area we should search to find the causes.

THE SOUND BARRIER

Common sense tells us that such delay figures should be swamped by the time it takes for the sound to travel from the loudspeaker to the ear, but we must also consider the ability of the brain to compare the time taken between sending its impulses to the player's fingers and the time of arrival of the sound pressure wave at the eardrum.

Our brains are sophisticated things. A musician can detect a difference in pitch between two simultaneously played notes of less than 10 cents, although few can name with certainty a single note played in isolation. So it's easy to factor in constants like the speed of sound when assessing two amps played back to back. As in many other kinds of experience, we seem to be more alert to differences than to common ground.



4 **A conventional modern PCB layout with some close parallel tracks**

Ask a guitarist to comment on a hardwired amp and a later PCB version and the answer with probably be 'it feels different'

PCBs OLD AND NEW

You might argue that the increased complexity of modern amp circuits might account for this, but that doesn't explain the perceived difference between the same model built with the two methods. Considering the electrical character of a PCB made using modern techniques may help us find the explanation. In the early days of PCBs, artwork was laboriously laid out by hand using special drafting tape on clear film, a lengthy and expensive process that also required photography. This drove a preference to keep tracking as short as possible, orienting components to bridge the board with their own size and wire length, the tracks serving primarily as a method of making junctions **(Pic 3)**. Larger boards used widely spaced tracks with lots of curvature **(Pic 2)**. From an electronic viewpoint, this wasn't too different from the tagboards and three-dimensional birds-nest assemblies of hardwired amps. But as circuits became more complex and components smaller it became necessary to line them up in dense rows to squeeze enough of them on boards that got more crowded with added features, and link them with circuitous tracking made using software-driven drafting programmes. Closely spaced parallel tracks, the default preference of software-generated layouts, are a common feature of PCBs drafted like this **(Pic 4)**.

JUMPING THE TRACKS

This kind of tracking is used in computers, but computer circuits have a speed and bandwidth far greater than those of valve amps, so its effects are arguably negligible. Also, this takes no account of the much greater impedance and signal level differences in a valve circuit. In computers, impedances are generally no more than a few hundred ohms, with signal levels confined to 5 or 6 volts at most. In a valve amp they can range over several megohms, with signal levels up to 50 volts. A feasible intertrack capacitance of 10pF (closely spaced parallel tracks measure about 1pF per cm), equivalent to such a capacitor being connected between signal and earth in a valve circuit, would have little effect at the low impedances of digital switching circuitry, amounting to a resistance of 50K ohms. In the grid circuit of a valve long-tail pair driver stage, with working impedances of several megohms and gain about 50 times, it affects much lower frequencies, feasibly from 5Khz upwards. These frequencies are within the range of touch perception and have a measurable effect on transient response in high-gain valve stages (see our techie sidebar).

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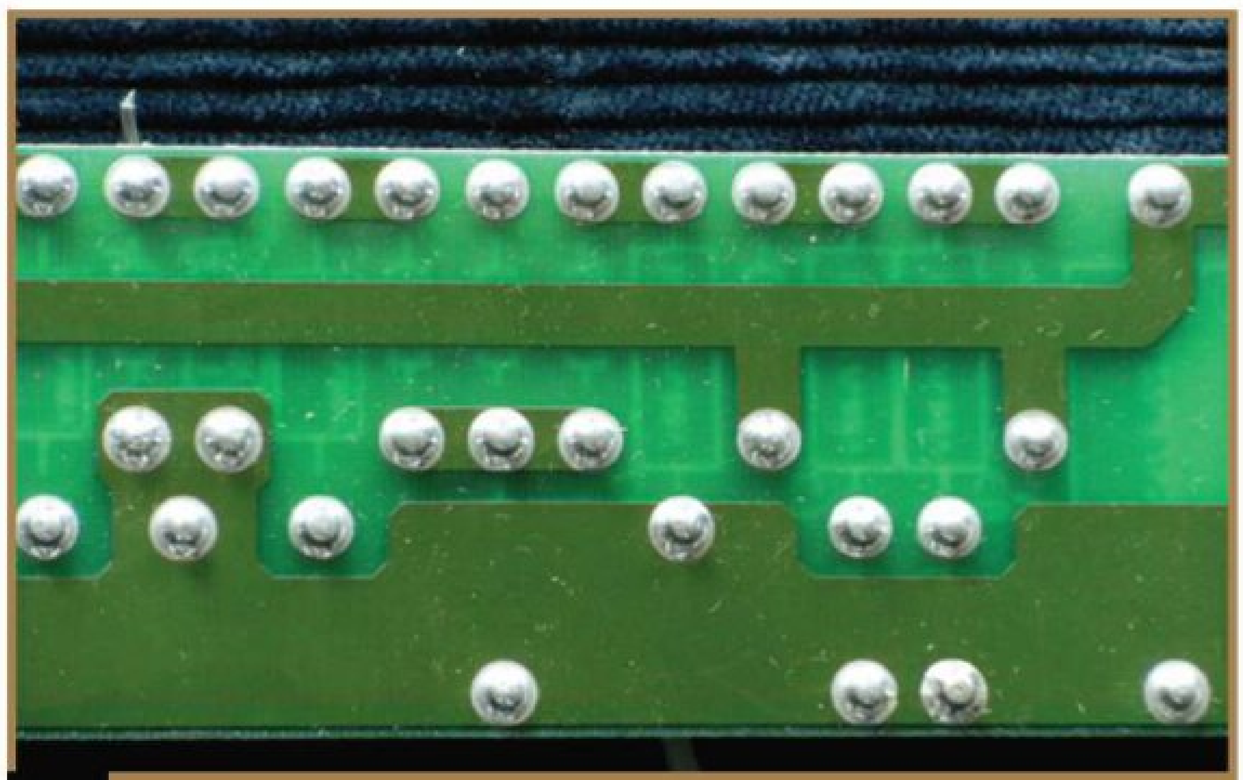
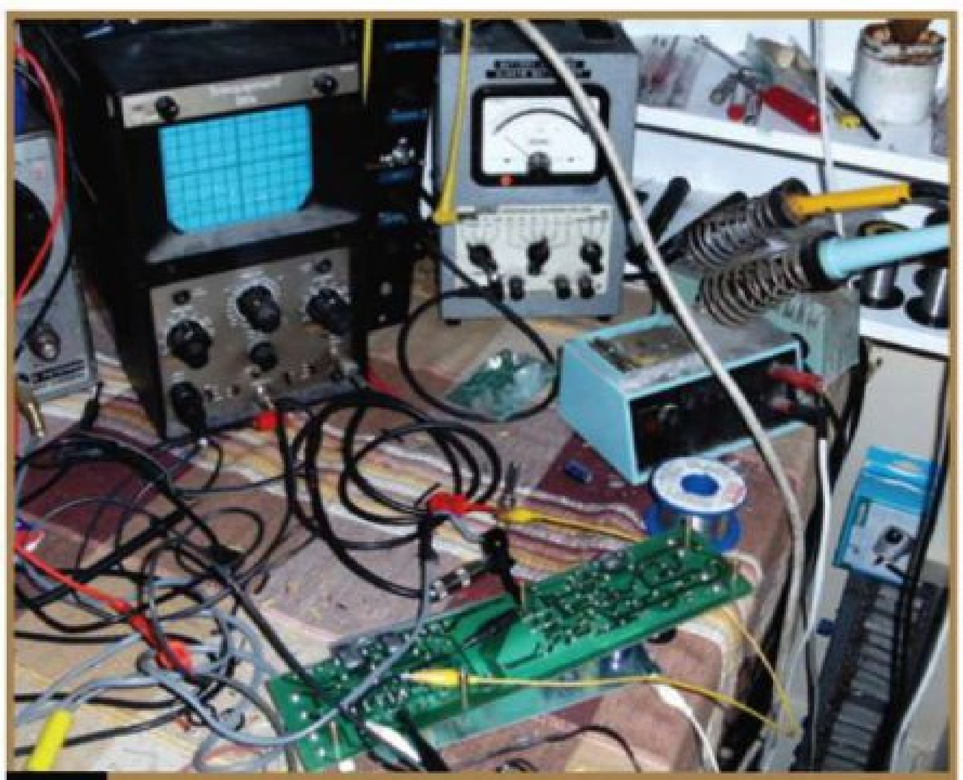


5 Into reverse gear? A 'trackless' PCB from a recent upmarket valve amp



6 The rig used for our bench test, with waveform generator and twin-beam scope. Too many wires!

We found that parallel PCB tracks gave a rise-time comparable to using a non-high quality guitar cable

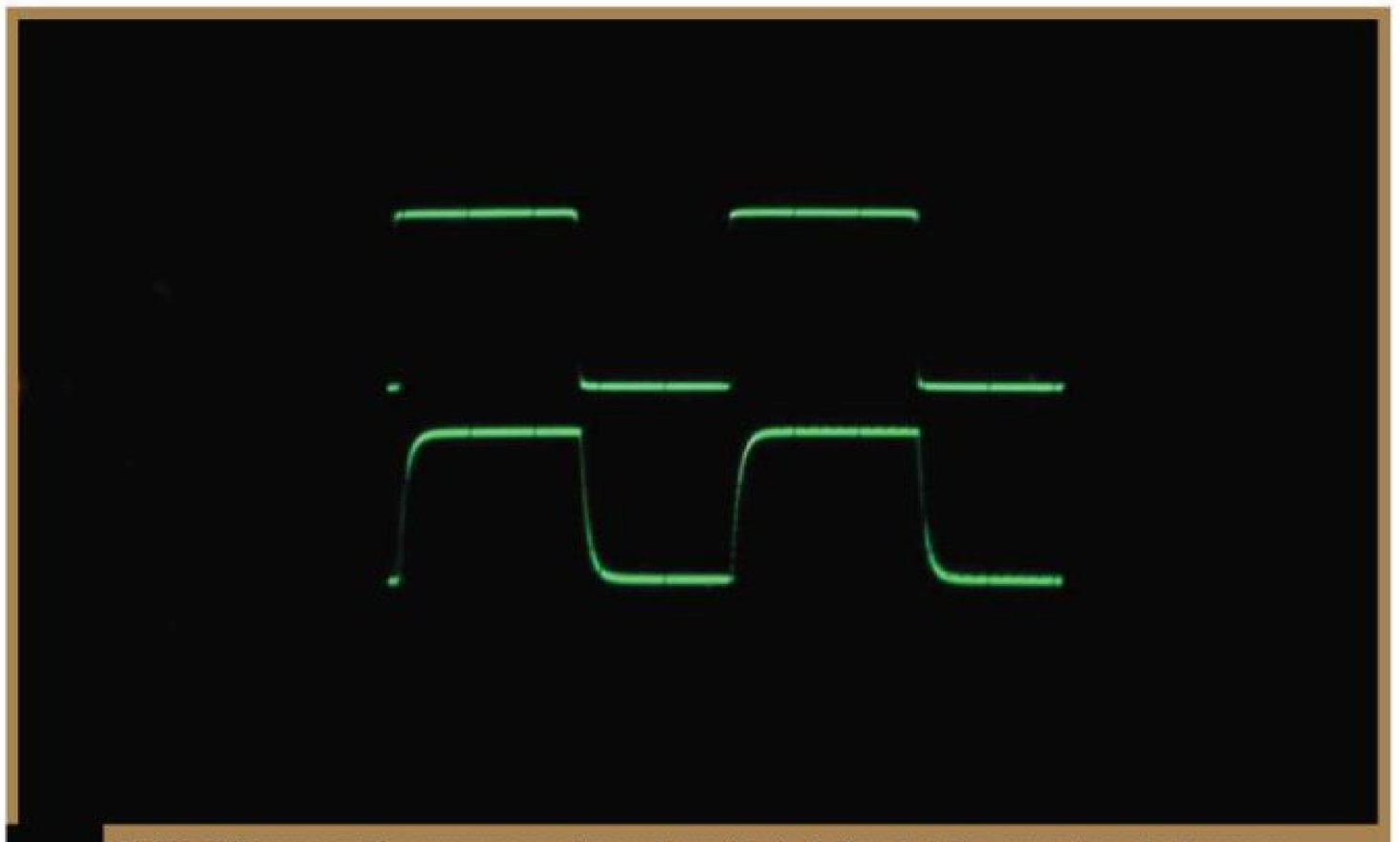
A WORKABLE SOLUTION?

Part of my own work, in response to customer demand, is to return PCB-built versions of classic amps to the sonic character of the hardwired originals. One popular modification is of a famous amp that was re-introduced in an updated version a few years ago. I normally remove its PCB-based preamp assembly and replace it with a hard-wired one, but an equally significant improvement is to disconnect from the power-stage PCB the resistors that couple the driver stage signal to the output valves and mount them on old-style tagstrips with flying wire connections. With this done, the amp 'comes alive', in the words of one customer.

Although hardwiring the preamp board makes a tonal difference, the amp only regains the touch response of the hardwired version with this modification. This is the part of the circuit where impedances and signal levels are at their highest and small changes could be expected to have a significant effect.

I wouldn't suggest that this is the only way of solving the problem. Recently, one or two manufacturers have reverted to an earlier type of PCB layout, using a 'trackless' PCB on which the components are fitted between turret tags whose connections are on common printed sections of board, avoiding interconnecting tracks **(Pic 5)**.

While this is only practical with uncomplicated circuitry, it offers a solution for building older designs, which aren't usually densely populated, on PCBs, so most of their cost savings can be realised without sonic penalties. The claims of guitarists to hear differences that can't be effectively measured have traditionally been derided by the technical fraternity – but now they've become a starting point for any amp manufacturer who wants to be taken seriously.



7 Visible differences. The upper scope trace shows the test signal at the generator; the lower one shows it after the resistor with the PCB connected. Note the increased slope angle and rounded leading-edge corner of the lower trace, a response to increased capacitance

Techie Sidebar: Transient Response Measurements

We were curious about how a subjective phenomenon like the 'touch response' of a guitar could be quantified, so we did some benchwork (Pic 6). A possible method of assessing this aspect of amplifiers is the square wave test. A perfect square wave has a practically non-existent rise time – it goes from zero level to max in a microsecond. Observing the output of an amp or circuit driven with a square wave reveals a lot about its transient response behaviour, which is an important element, if not the key, to touch response. No valve amp tracks a square wave perfectly, and the slight slope given to its leading edge by most analogue amp circuits is used as a measure of their success or otherwise in following its instantaneous rise-time. The difference between the vertical rise of the test-signal and the slightly less vertical version of the amp's output is measurable in µS (microseconds) on the horizontal (X-) axis of an oscilloscope.

To test the effect of long parallel PCB tracks on transient response, two such tracks were isolated and a I kHz square wave applied to one end via a resistor, to simulate the high source impedance of a valve amplifying stage, the other track being used as the earth return. This resistor causes the squarewave to slope, even without connecting it to the PCB, because it interacts with the capacitance of the scope's test probe – but the slope increased when the end of the resistor touched the PCB track. The rise time reading the generator direct was measured at 1µS, via the resistor on its own 10µS, and 15µS with the resistor connected to the PCB (Pic 7). The tested track distance of 10cm is not uncommon in larger layouts. Often more than one such circuit would be found in an amp, and three such stages might add 15µS to the rise-time over the hardwired version. It's the difference between a high-quality guitar cable and an average one.

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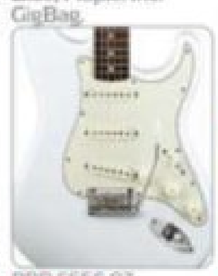

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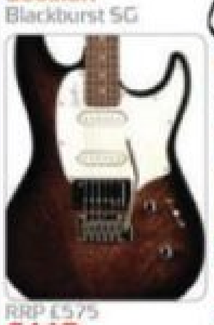

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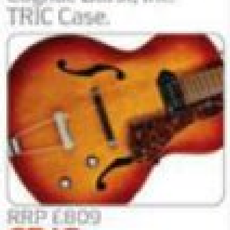

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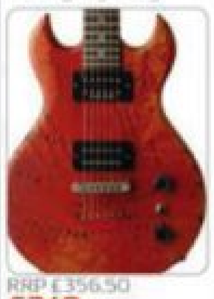

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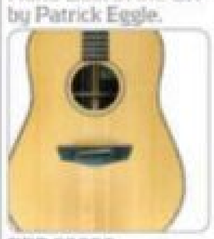

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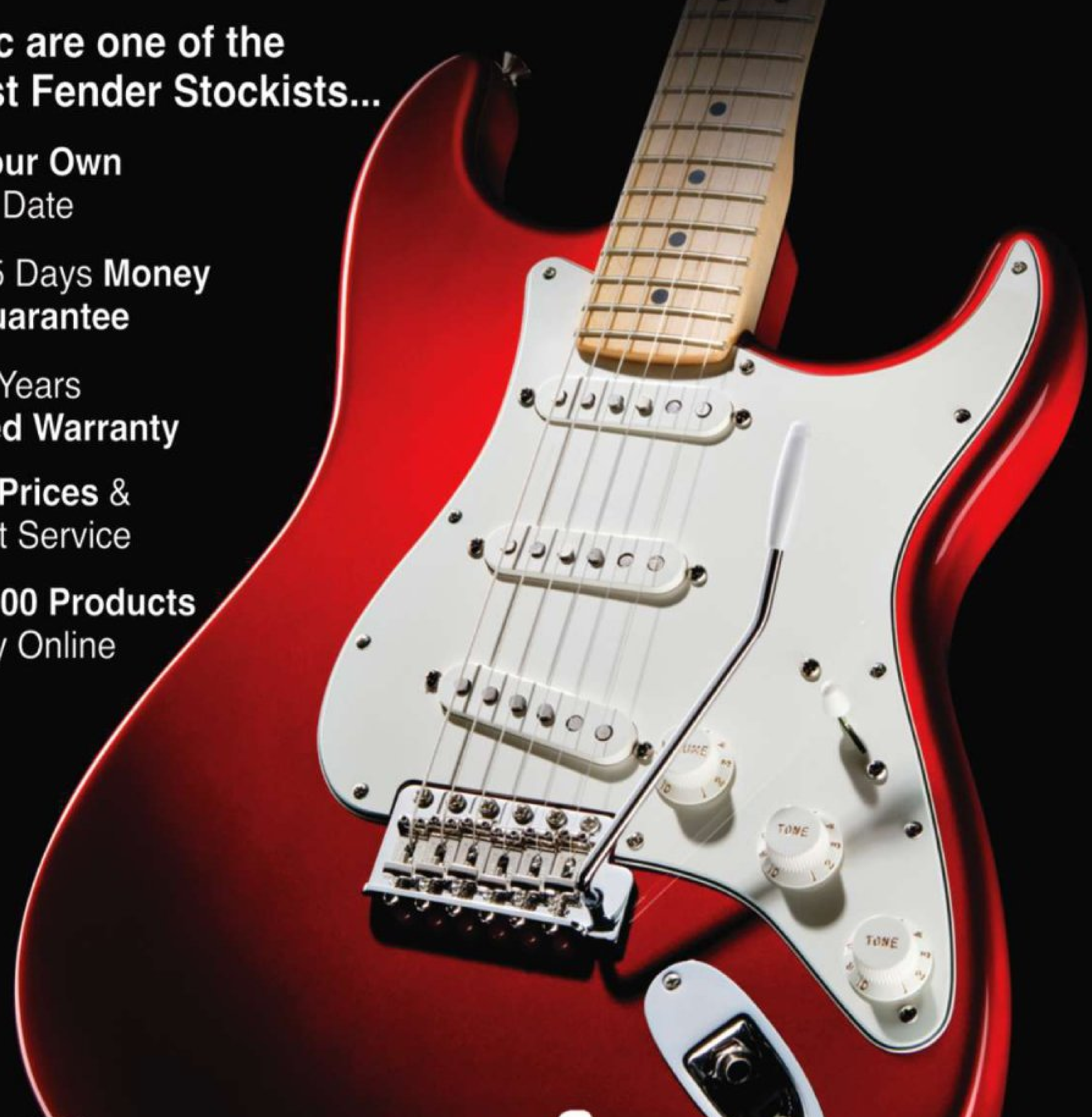

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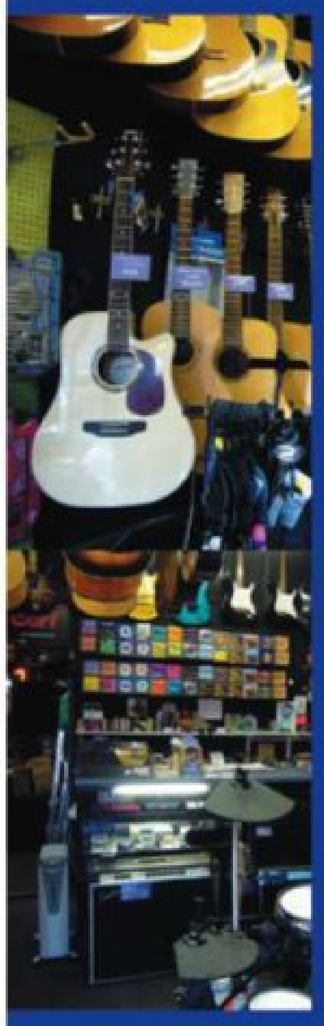

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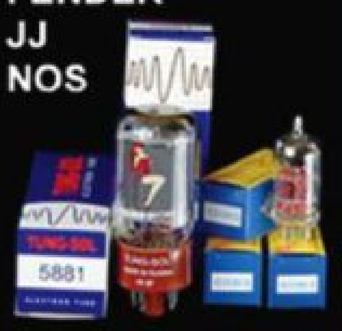

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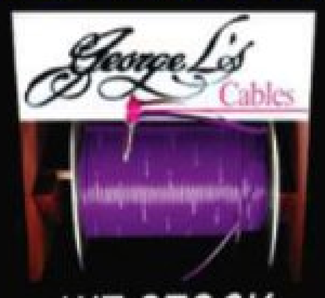

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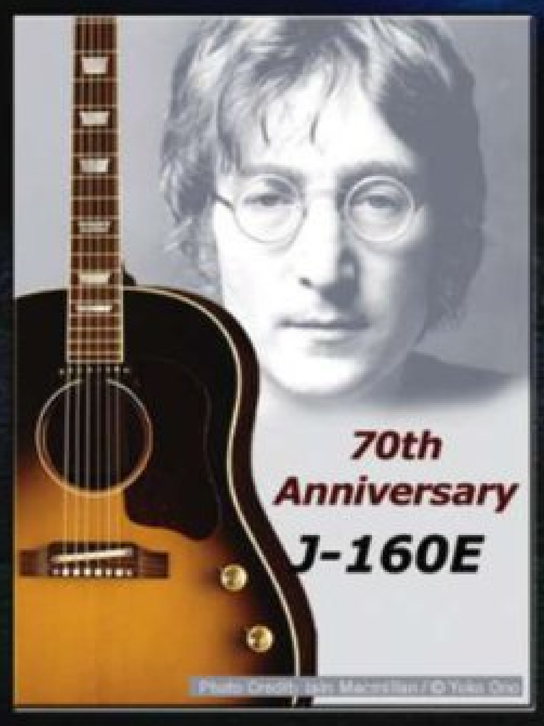

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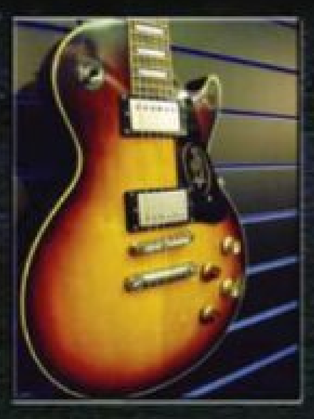

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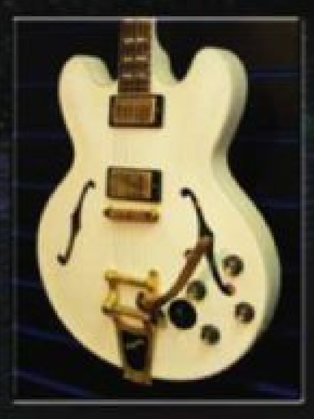

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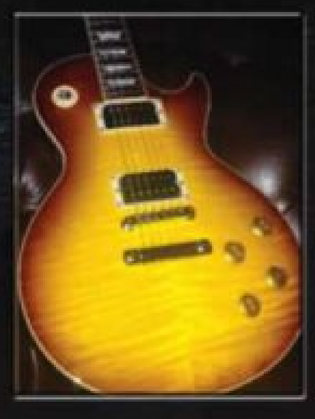

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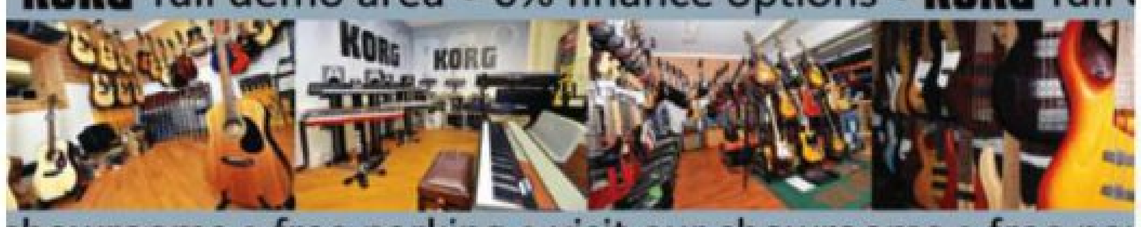

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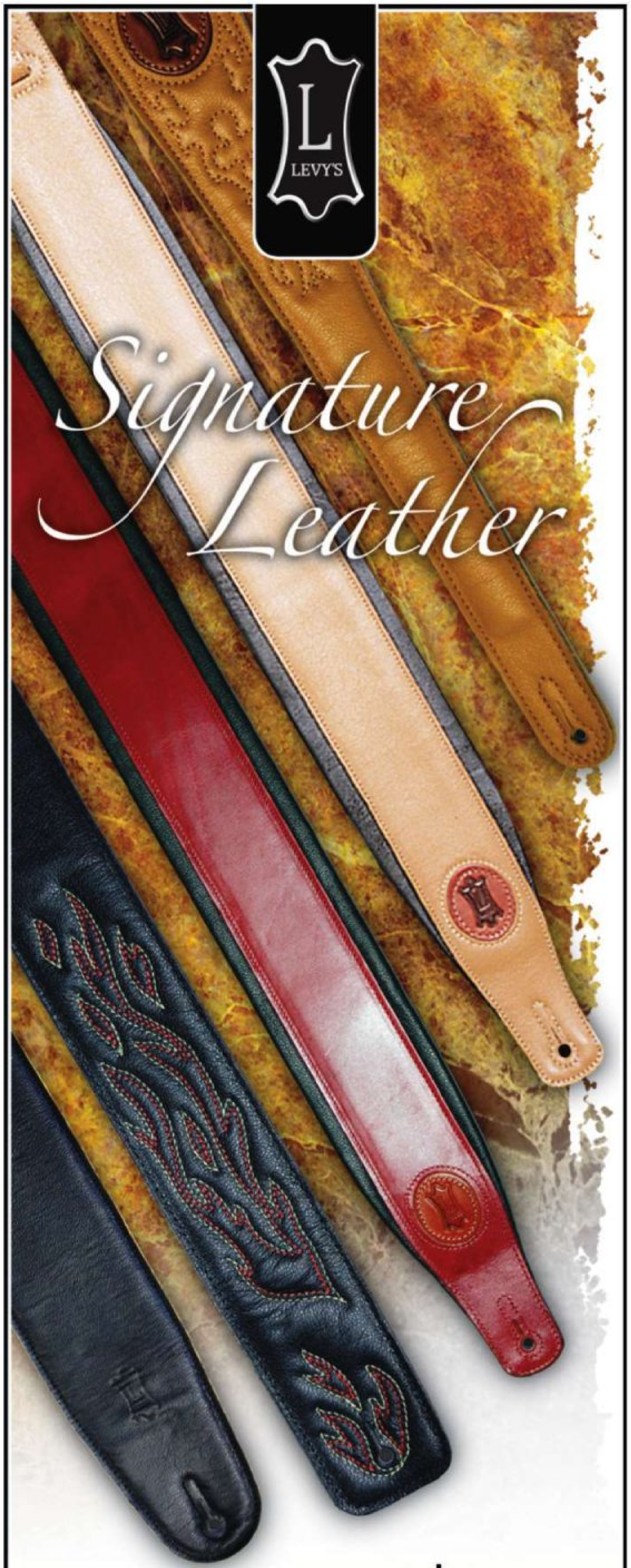

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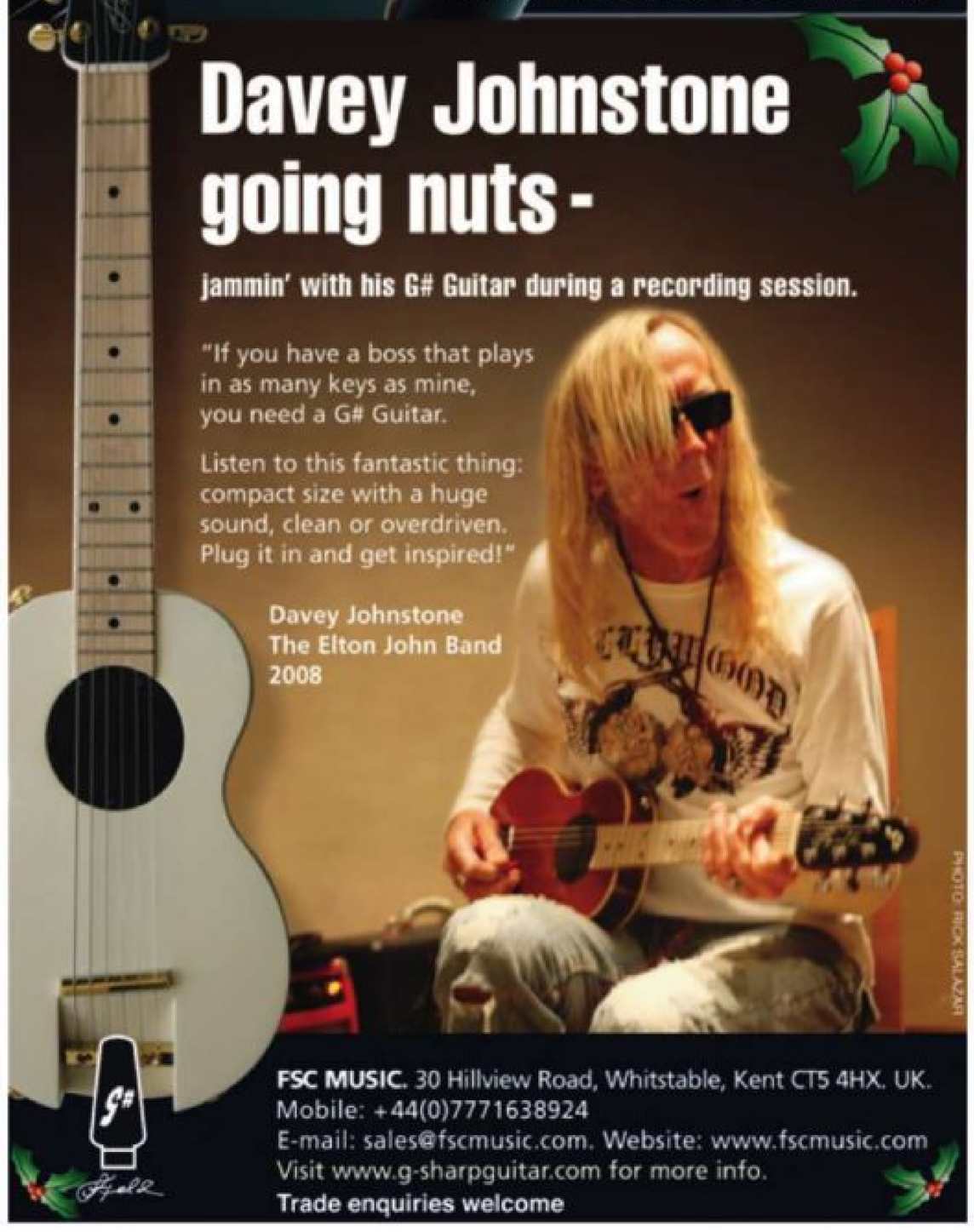

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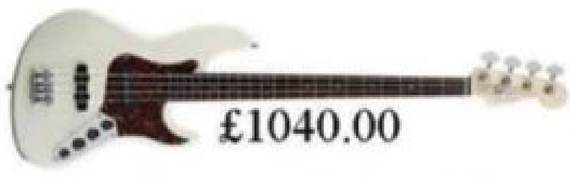

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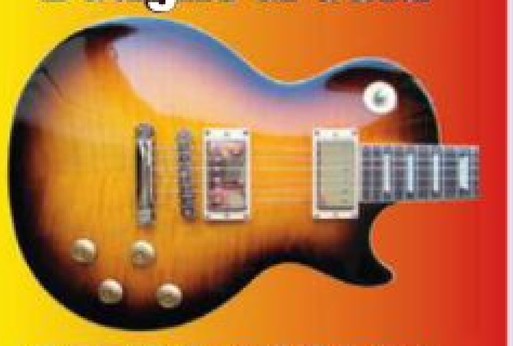
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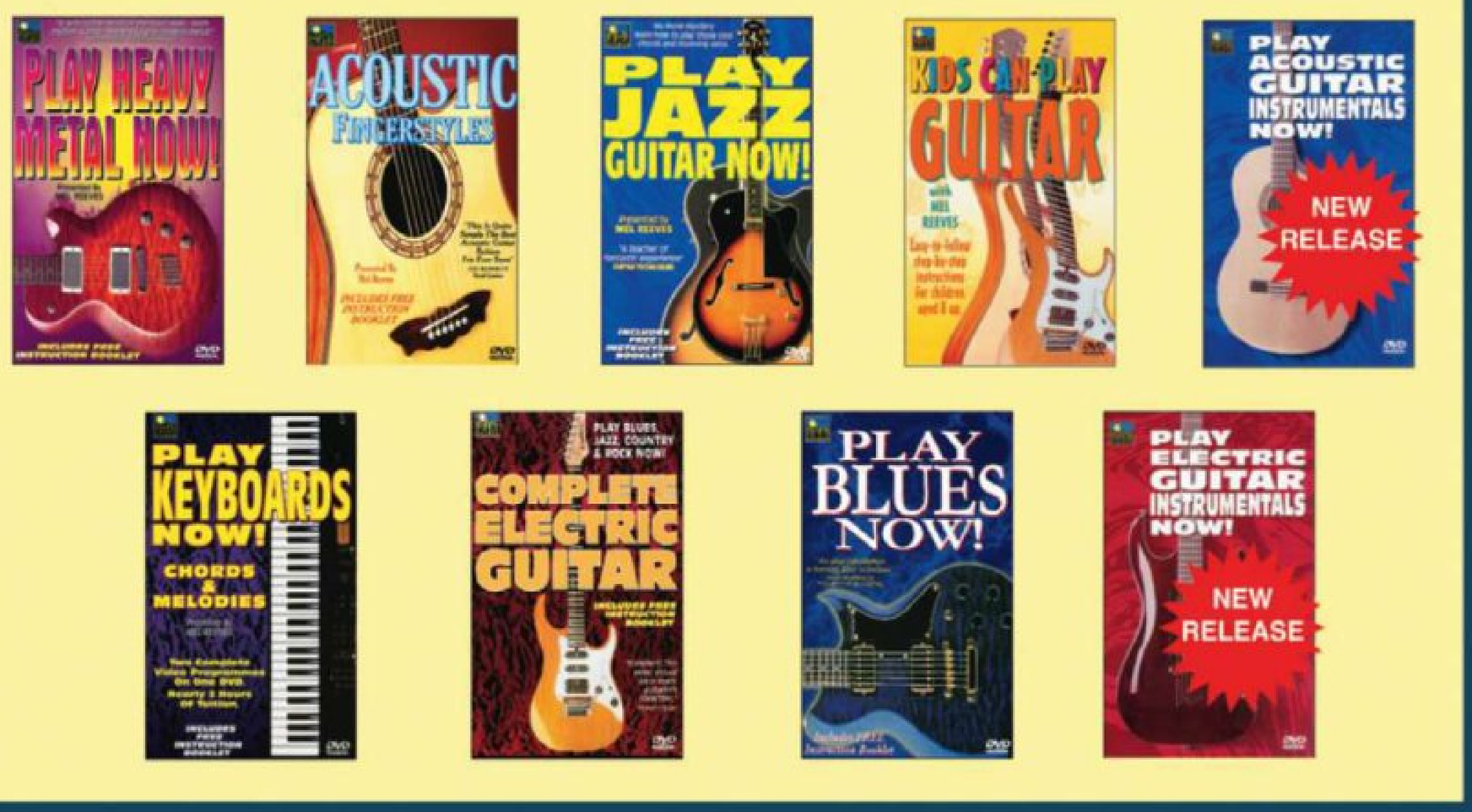

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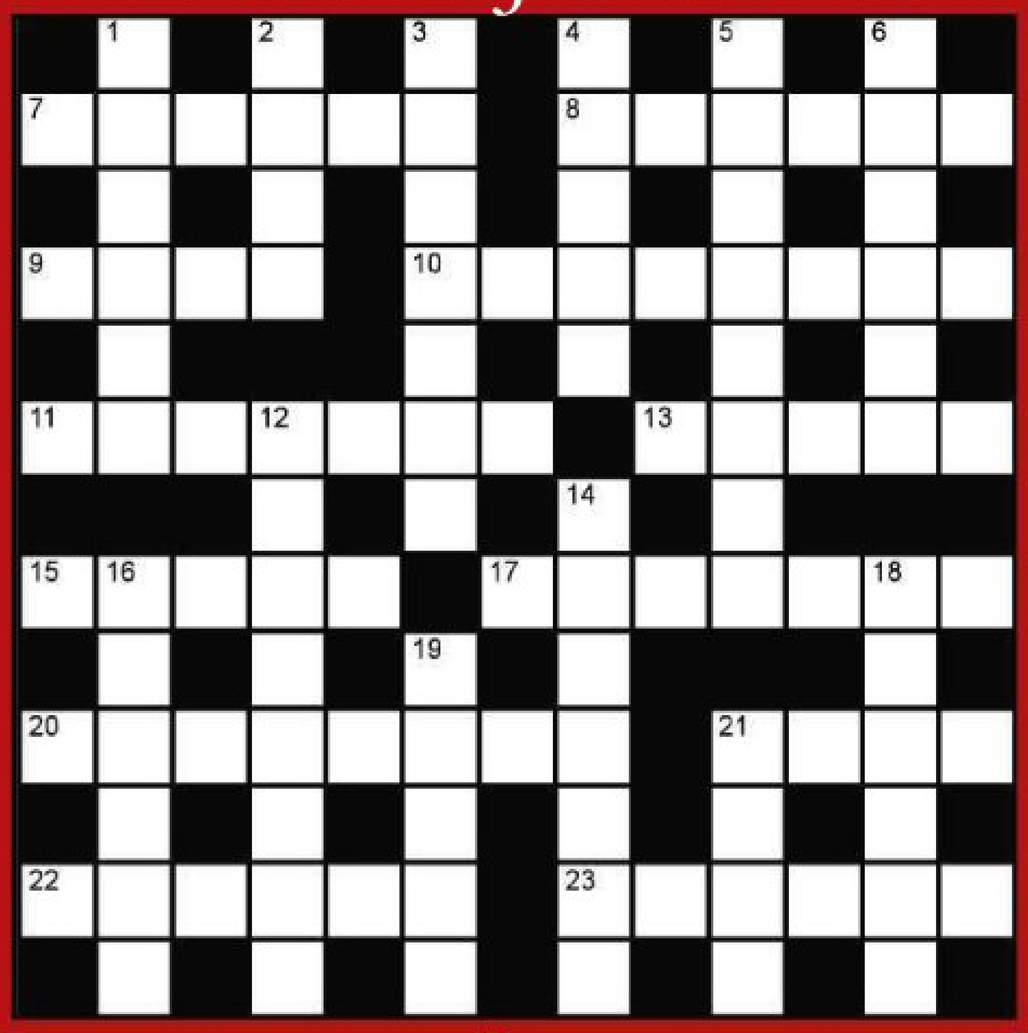

ACROSS

7. Bust-up re amphetamines hides line level device (6)

8. Horn he confuses for German company (6)

9. Starship captain in Metallica? (4)

10. All directions leer back to current affairs film (8)

11. Mick _____ (#7) (7)

13. Reportedly the celebrity in the Beatles (5)

15. Secret store hidden by first ashore (5)

17. Spin ego to make portable amp (7)

20. Country man Carl mixed up in York (3,5)

21. Call out to attract icy rain (4)

22. About to follow sales to consumer (6)

23. Jude to mixup Harrison's Gretsch (3,3)

DOWN

1. Shade of metal axxe? (6)

2. ___ Knopfler (4)

3. Patron is pro sons (7)

4. ___ Lane (Black Oak Arkansas) (5)

5. Epiphone thinline from North Sea storm (8)

6. Harmony guitar awarded in Ireland (6)

12. Ernie Ball company that comes from down your way (5,3)

14. Kind of blockade loses heart to Bristol luthier (7)

16. Robin ____ (Procol Harum) (6)

18. Line 6 amp from the web? (6)

19. One of Derek's assorted love songs (5)

21. The catchy bit from mancunian Peter (4)

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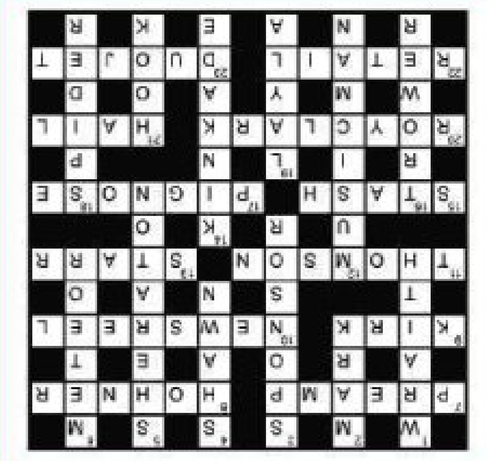

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Chuck Berry

Guitar Techniques

Today, we consider Chuck Berry to be a true original, the first great 'crossover' artist from the Chess stable and the man who married blues with teen-friendly pop lyrics – but the man himself has a contrary opinion. 'I still don't recognise any style of my own,' he once said – an astonishing admission from a man rarely lacking in self-belief. 'What I do is just a portion of all that I've heard before me – Carl Hogan with Louis Jordan and his Tympany Five, blues players like T-Bone Walker. Illinois Jacquet – a big influence. Charlie Christian, too. *Solo Flight*! It's so great... I got the first 16 bars down. It took me 30 years.'

True enough, Louis Jordan's *Ain't That Just Like a Woman* with guitarist's Carl Hogan superb intro is widely regarded as being the inspiration for the opening riff of Berry's classic *Johnny B Goode*. Berry is somewhat coy on this: 'I can't really say, but he did something that influenced the way I do *Johnny*, something similar.' And what of Berry's predilection for unusual keys, with songs like *Johnny B Goode* played in Bb? Berry answer is simple. 'The symphonies are in Bb or Eb!'

This month we'll look at some of Berry's influences, then some stock licks and rhythm guitar parts, and then finally a few of Berry's 'descriptive' licks that echo his brilliant lyrics.

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Chuck Berry Play Like

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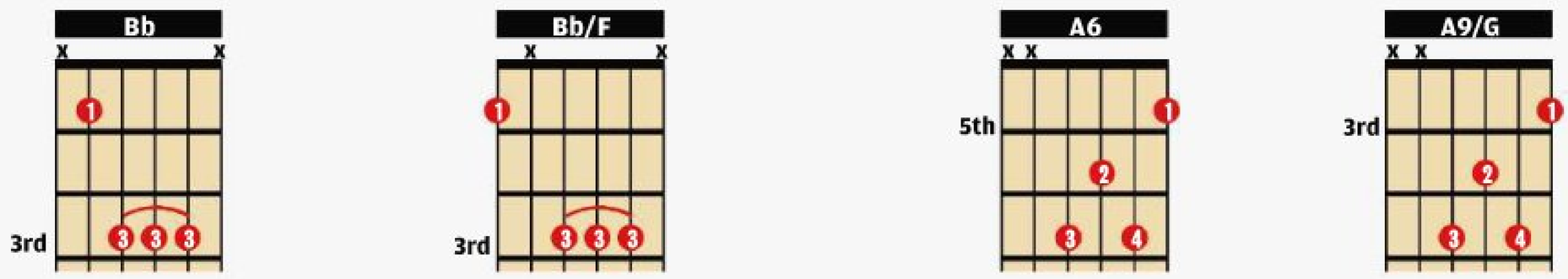
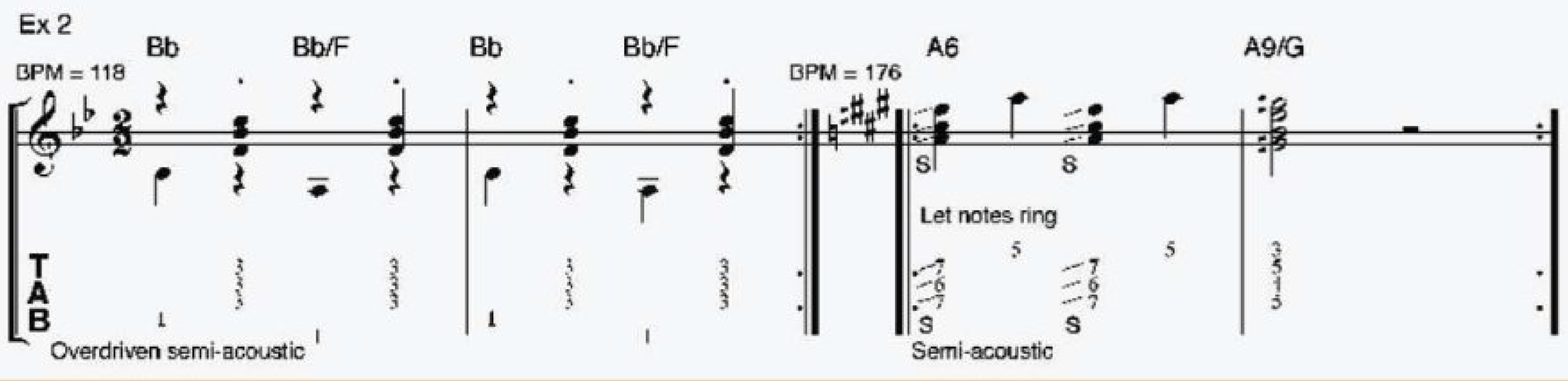
Ex 1: Bb, Bb/F, A6 and A9/G chords



To begin, let's look at a couple of important Chuck Berry chord shapes. First, this voicing of Bb involves your third finger lying flat across strings 4, 3 and 2 at the third fret. Next comes a Bb/F (a Bb with an F in the bass); simply move the first finger to the bottom string to fret the F note. The final two chords are A6 and A9/G; you'll notice they are exactly the same shape, but the A9/G is two frets lower than A6. A9/G could be called G6, but we're calling it A9/G because when we come to use it in Ex 2 we'll be playing it over an A bass note, so it's named with reference to A as the root note, not G.

Ex 2: Country and blues influences

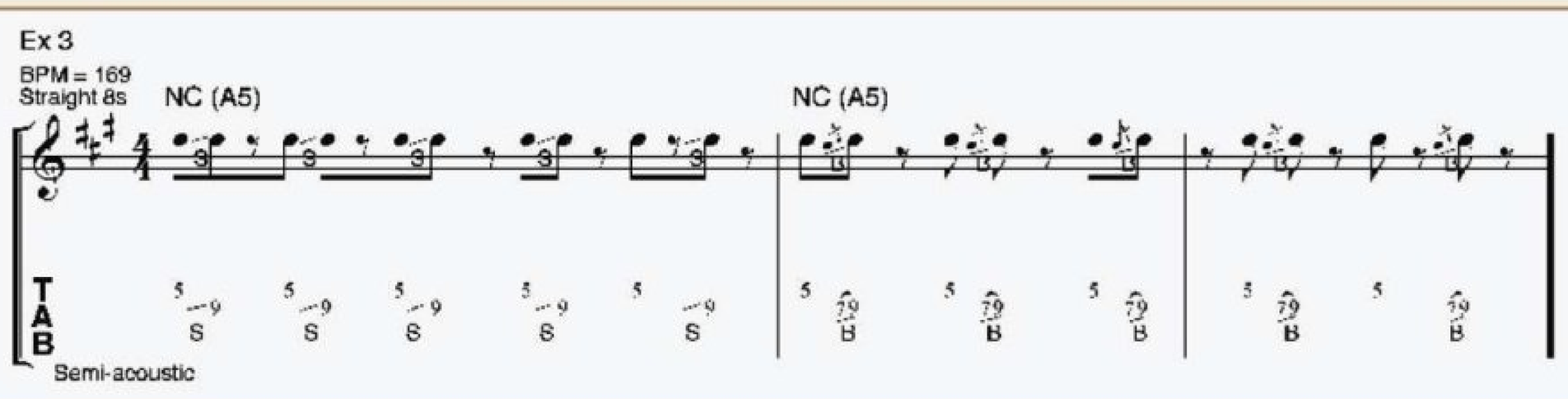
2/2 Time



Chuck Berry is steeped in blues – one example is his song *Around And Around* – while his breakthrough hit *Maybellene*, an adaptation of an old traditional fiddle tune called *Ida Red*, shows a clear country influence. The main accompaniment pattern of *Maybellene* is based on the alternating root and fifth notes of the chord, with a staccato chord in the middle. Unusually for 1955, Berry plays the song with a distinctly overdriven tone. The rhythm guitar plays a part similar to the one shown in bars 3 and 4 above – a chordal lick much used in blues. Finger the chords using the shapes from Ex 1, and let the notes ring on. Note the slides into beats 1 and 3. In the first bar, try using a downstroke with the pick on beats 1 and 3 and an upstroke on beats 2 and 4.

Ex 3: Charlie Christian lick

4/4 Time



Berry made good and frequent use of a cool lick originally recorded by jazz guitar pioneer Charlie Christian. Christian would alternate between the same note played on two adjacent strings, such as strings 2 and 3, sliding up to the lower of the two notes on the third string in a syncopated rhythm. Berry adapted this move by bending up the note on the third string, as shown in bars 3 and 4 of the exercise above. You can hear Berry using this type of lick in the famous *Johnny B Goode* intro, and he can also be heard milking this lick like nobody's business in the *Maybellene* solo.

A Chuck Berry Gear File

In his early career Chuck Berry played an Epiphone archtop electric and a Gibson Les Paul Custom, but his main instrument was a Gibson ES-350 semi-acoustic. Introduced in the late 1940s, this guitar had single coil P90s. Later, Berry played a series of Gibson ES-355s. 'Those two are really just about the same to me,' he said. 'One body's a bit thinner, the newer one. I haven't really paid much attention to the sound... my big Gretsch was heavy, so I like the hollowbody Gibsons. The lighter, the better. Otherwise, it doesn't matter. I don't notice the difference, unless it's got extra reach up the neck, like on the Fender. Range is important, getting up the neck. I've always liked the Fender, but I've not bought one because they don't do much in hollowbodies.'

On his early recordings, Berry played through a small Fender amp – 'with the flat control panel carved out of the back, and the whole thing was covered with a leatherish, funkyish, tableclothish material.' When touring, Berry required the promoter to provide amplification – and, famously, an entire backing band – with Berry specifying 'two unaltered Fender Dual Showman Reverb amplifier sets.' This enabled Berry to tour in his unique style, travelling solo with only his guitar... plus, it's rumoured, a handgun in an attache case in case the promoter proved reluctant to pay up before Berry took the stage.

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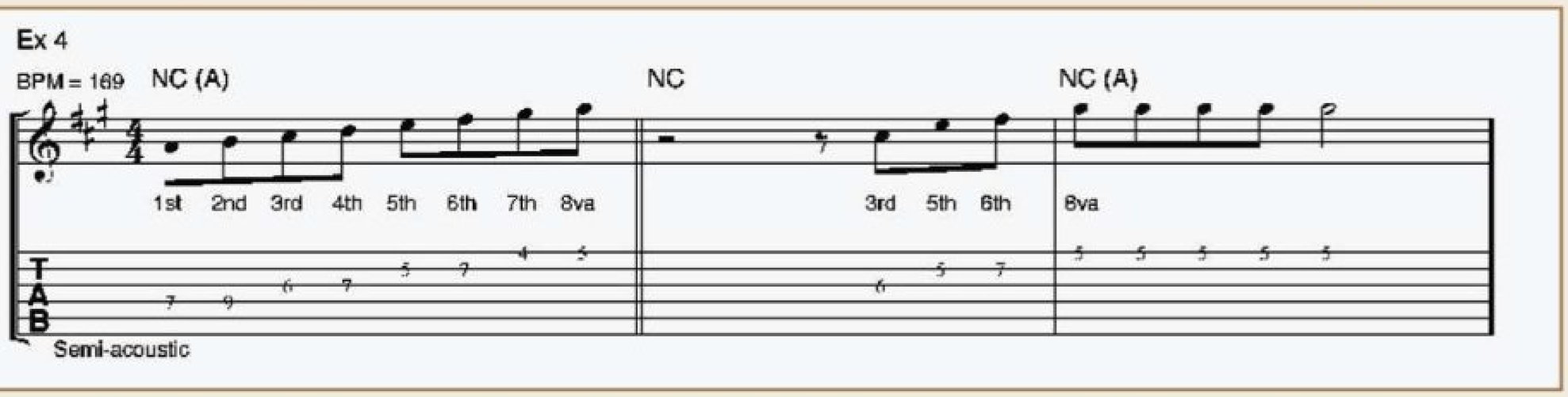
Ex 4: Three-note pickup

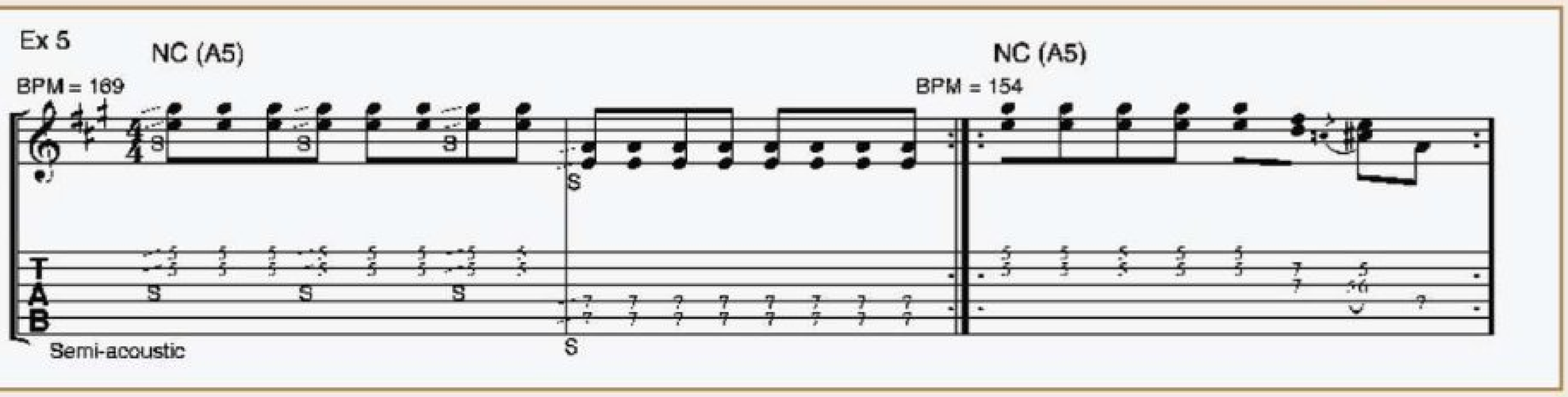
4/4 Time



Many Chuck Berry songs begin with a three-note pickup consisting of the third, fifth and sixth notes from the major scale. The first bar of this exercise shows a one-octave A major scale, with the notes numbered underneath. Bars 2 and 3 pick out the third, fifth and sixth notes, followed by the octave ('8va') in the second of these two bars, with the octave being played five times. This pickup can be heard at the start of *Johnny B Goode*, *Roll Over Beethoven*, *Carol*, *Back In The USA*, *Let It Rock* and *The Promised Land*. Never let it be said that Chuck Berry was known to waste a good lick!

Ex 5: Double stops, licks and fills

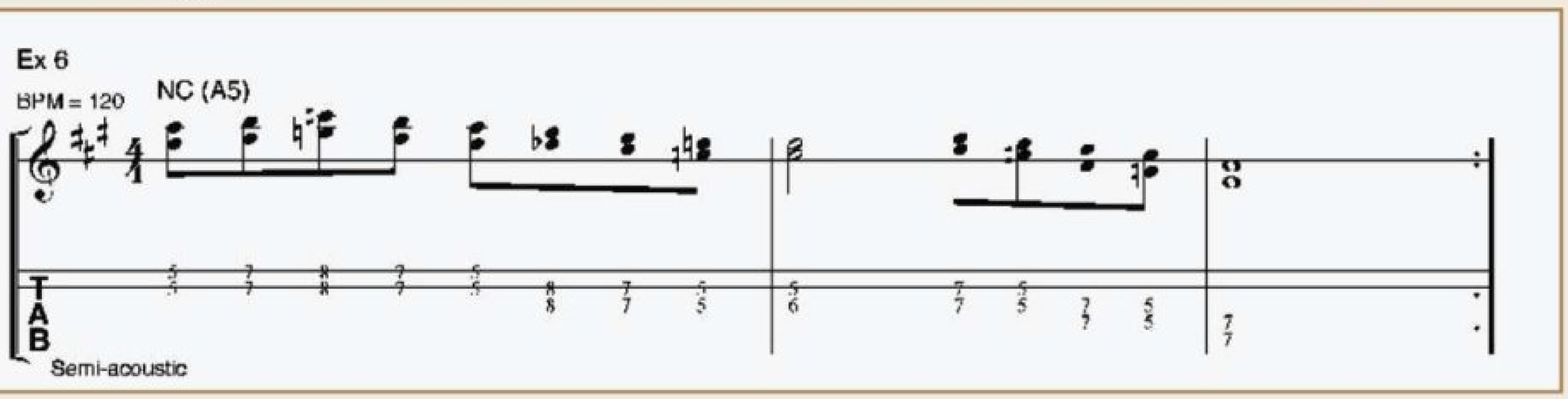
4/4 Time



Carl Hogan's intro to Louis Jordan's *Ain't That Just Like a Woman* is widely regarded as the inspiration behind Berry's *Johnny B Goode*. One significant difference is that Hogan plays the intro in single notes, while Berry fills out the sound by adding the note a perfect fourth lower on the second string, as in bar 1 above. Instead of simply repeating the notes, Berry often adds slides in a syncopated rhythm to add interest. Bar 2 shows the same double stop one octave lower, on strings 5 and 4. Bar 3 shows another double stop based fill much used by Berry, similar to the *Little Queenie* intro.

Ex 6: Double stop phrases

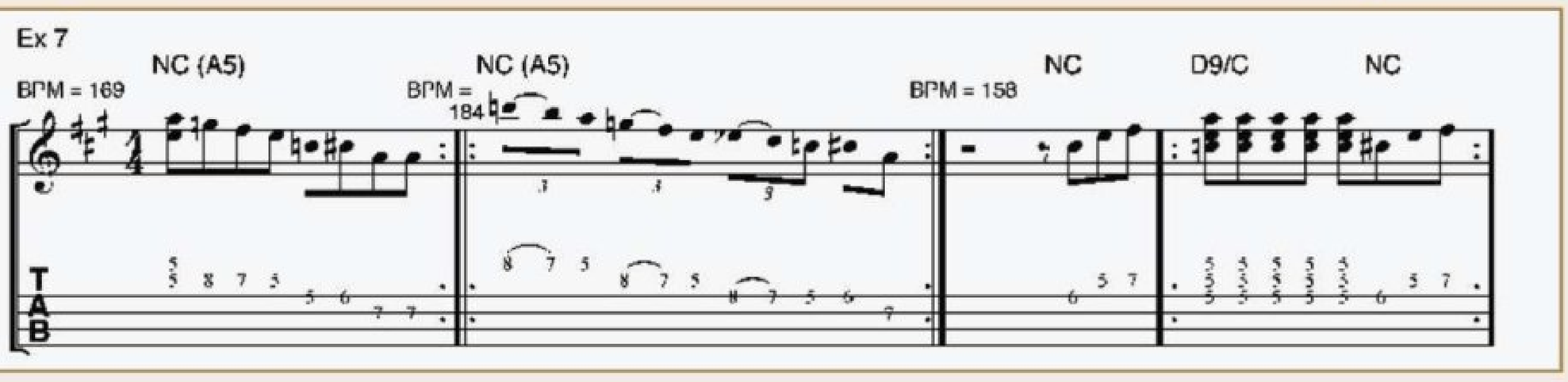
4/4 Time



One of Berry's most famous tricks for filling out his lead work was the double-stop, adding a fifth interval on the second string. This exercise shows two phrases using double-stops; finger them by laying a finger of the fretting hand flat across each pair of strings. Notice the only double-stop in which the notes are not at the same fret is at the end of the first phrase at the start of bar 2 – a root and major third. When the pairs of notes are string pairs 2 and 1, 4 and 3 or 5 and 4, the notes produce a perfect fourth; on strings 3 and 2, playing both strings at the same fret makes a major third.

Ex 7: Other licks

4/4 Time



Here's a selection of licks that Berry uses in various songs. The first lick is similar to a phrase in the *Johnny B Goode* intro. The second similar to a phrase in the intro of *Roll Over Beethoven* with a pattern of slurred notes at frets 8, 7 and 5, moved from string 1 to string 3. Bars 3 and 4 explore the start of *Little Queenie* with three-note pickup; here, though, we're looking at a technique used in the second phrase of the intro, adding the note on the third string, fifth fret underneath the top two strings, both played at the fifth fret. This cleverly implies a move to chord IV – in this case, an inversion of the ninth chord.

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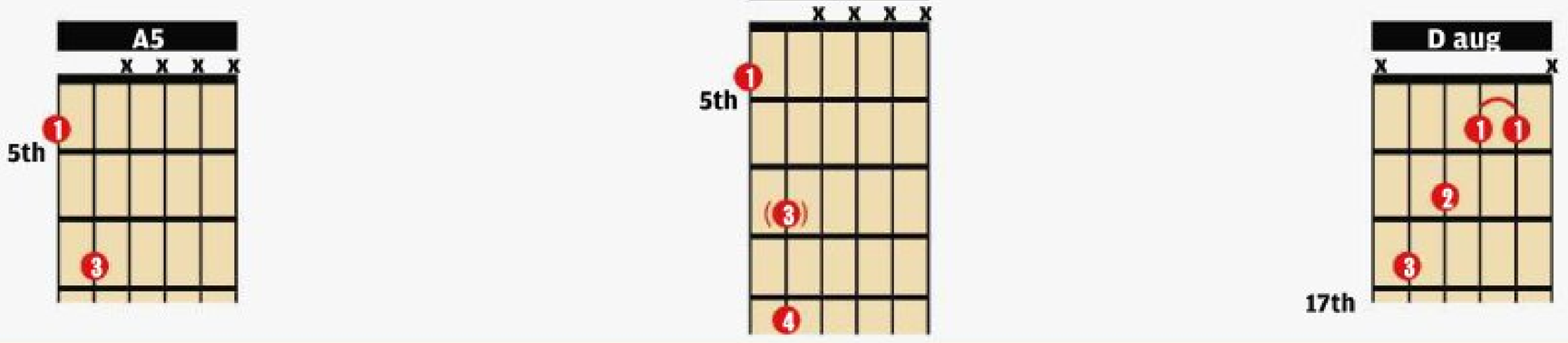
Ex 8: A5, A6 and Daug chords

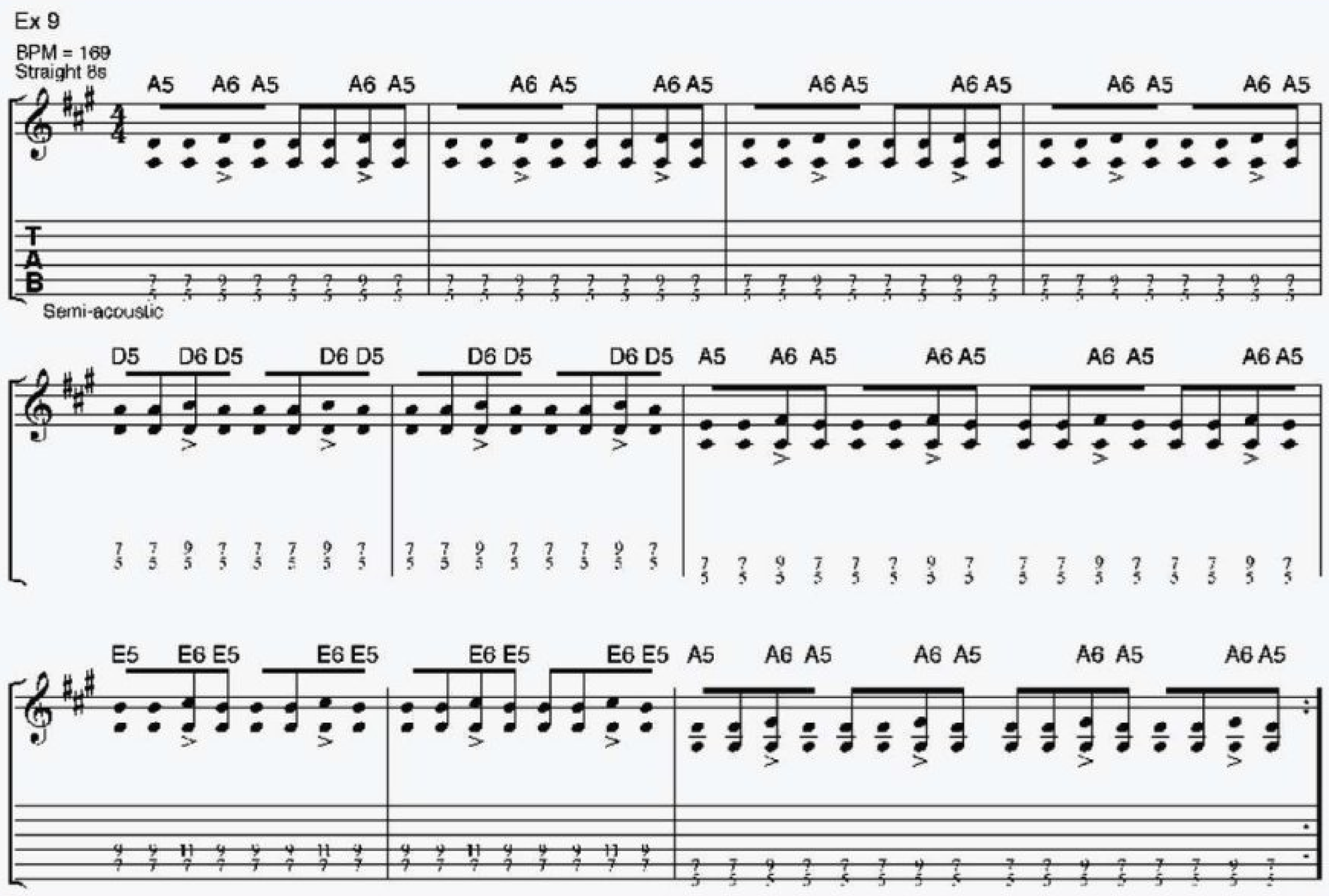


A 5 chord is one that consists of the root and the fifth degree of the major scale; since it doesn't contain a third it is neither major nor minor.

Similarly, a 6 chord is one that consists of the root note plus the sixth note of the scale. In D aug, the 'aug' is short for 'augmented'. An augmented chord consists of the root, major third and augmented fifth – this voicing has these notes in this order, plus the added octave at the top of the chord.

Ex 9: Rock'n'roll rhythm guitar

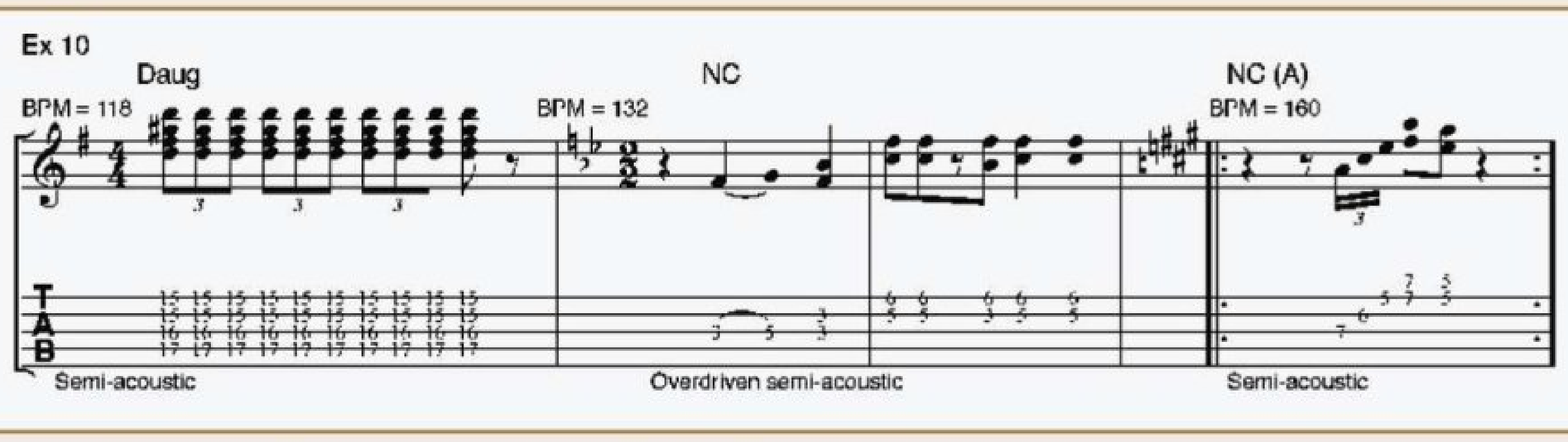
4/4 Time



Let's use the A5 and A6 shapes from Ex 8, shifted around to produce D5, D6, E5 and E6 chords, to put together a rhythm guitar part that echoes *Johnny B Goode*, played in the key of A. Note the 'straight 8s' feel as opposed to a 'shuffle feel'. The feel is really unique, with the rhythm guitar playing straight quavers with accents on beats 2 and 4. Although this song is based on a 12-bar blues, note the deviations from the form: Berry stays on chord I for bar 2 instead of moving to chord IV, and then in the last four bars of the progression he outlines V, V, I, I instead of the traditional V, IV, I, V.

Ex 10: Descriptive licks

4/4 Time



Schooldays starts with a fast strummed D augmented chord (bar 1), imitating the sound of the school bell (never one to waste a good intro, Berry makes a similar start to *No Particular Place To Go*).

At the start of *Maybellene* Chuck echoes the lyrics with the sound of a car horn using two-note chords, as in bars 2 and 3. A lesser-known Berry track called *Woodpecker* begins with a stock lick that imitates the sound of that tree-loving bird, similar to bar 4 of the exercise. Based on a barre A chord at the fifth fret, try plucking with three 'swept' downstrokes, followed by two upstrokes.

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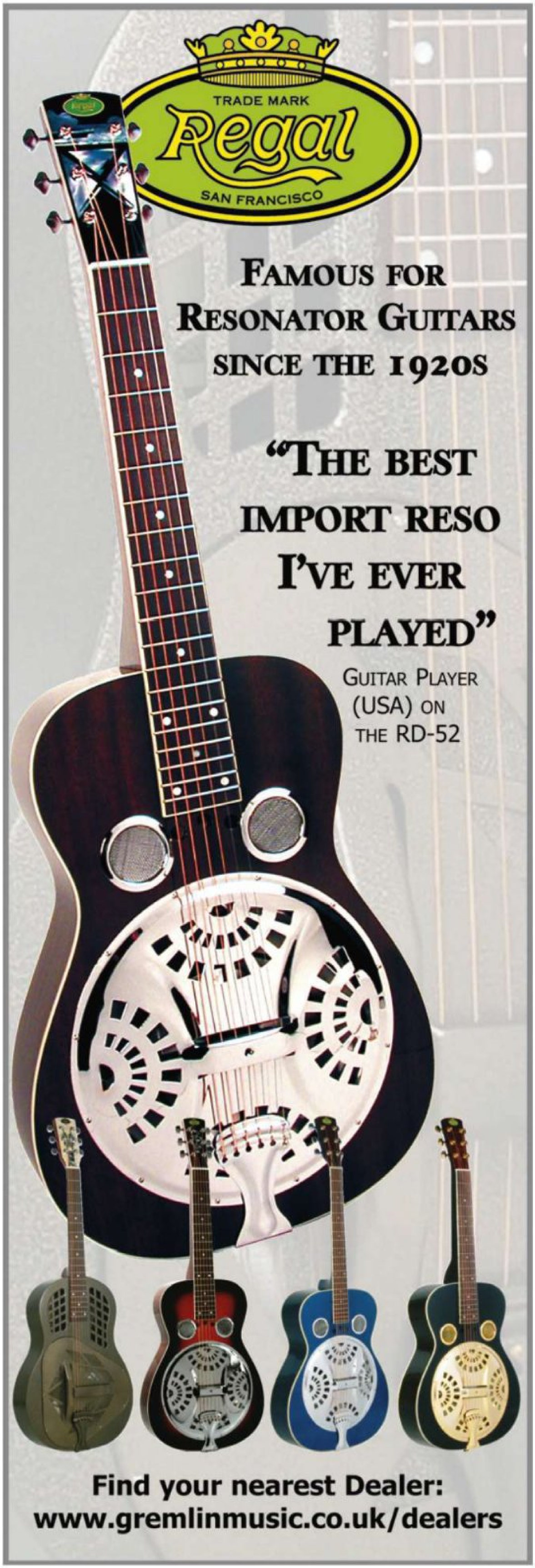

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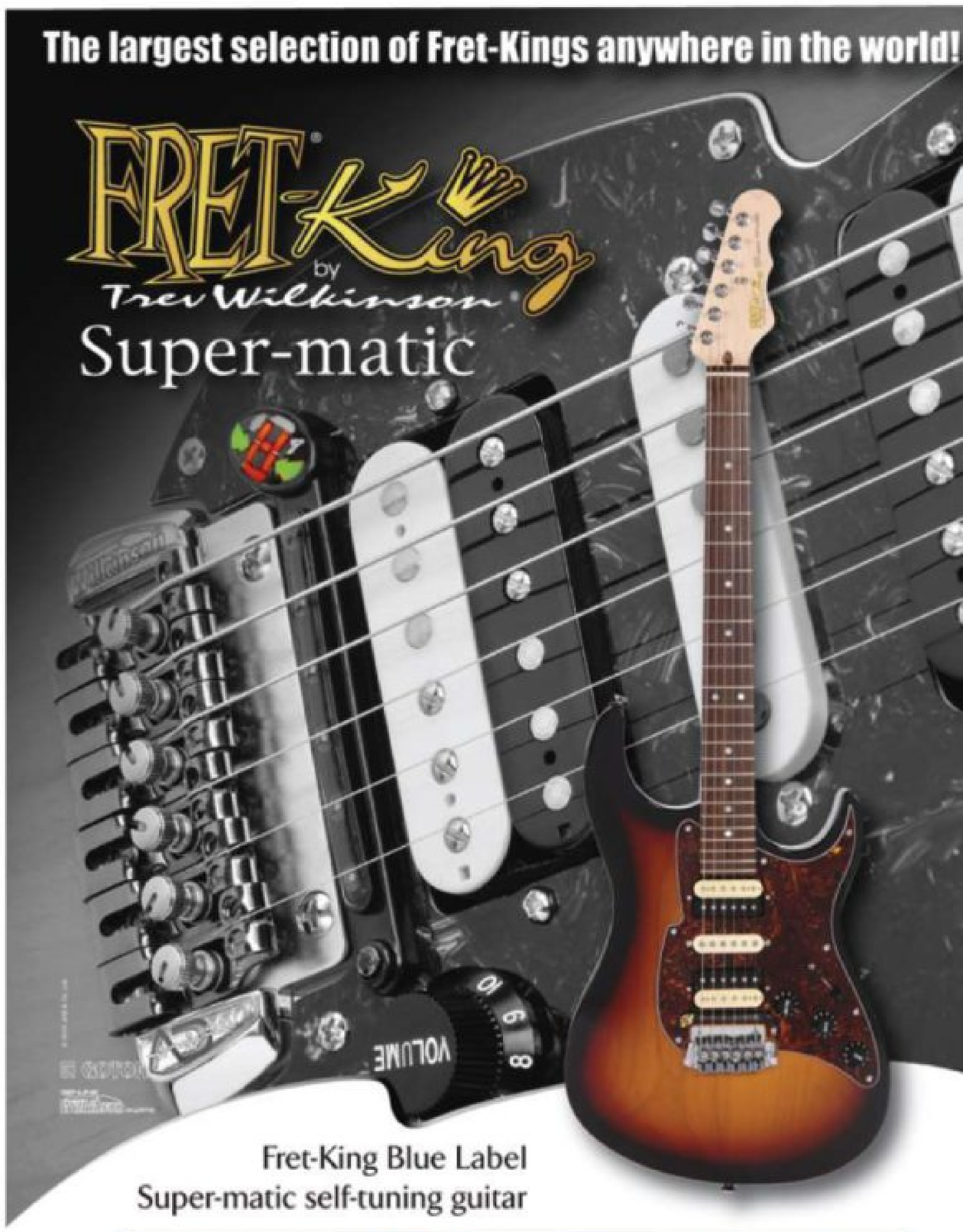

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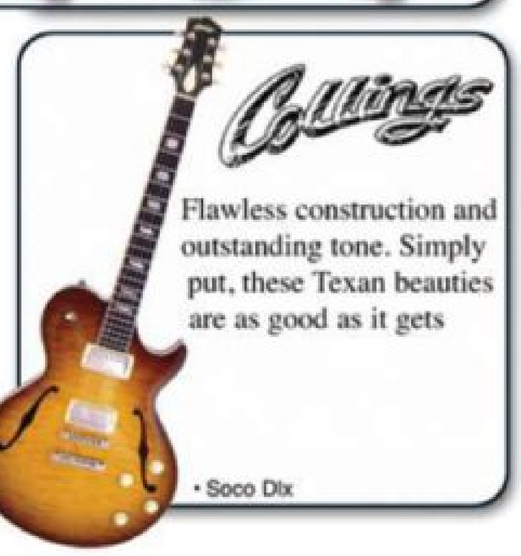

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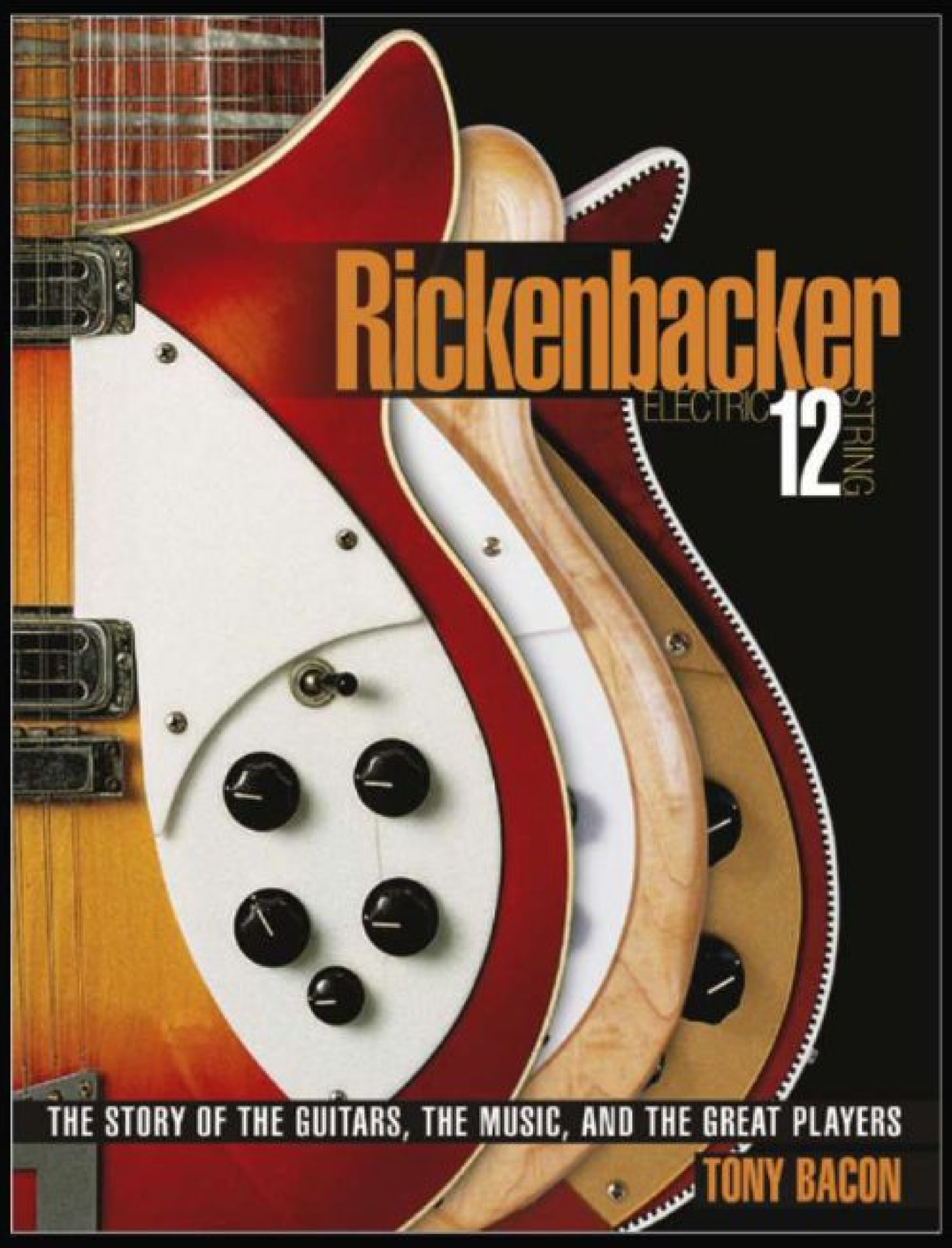

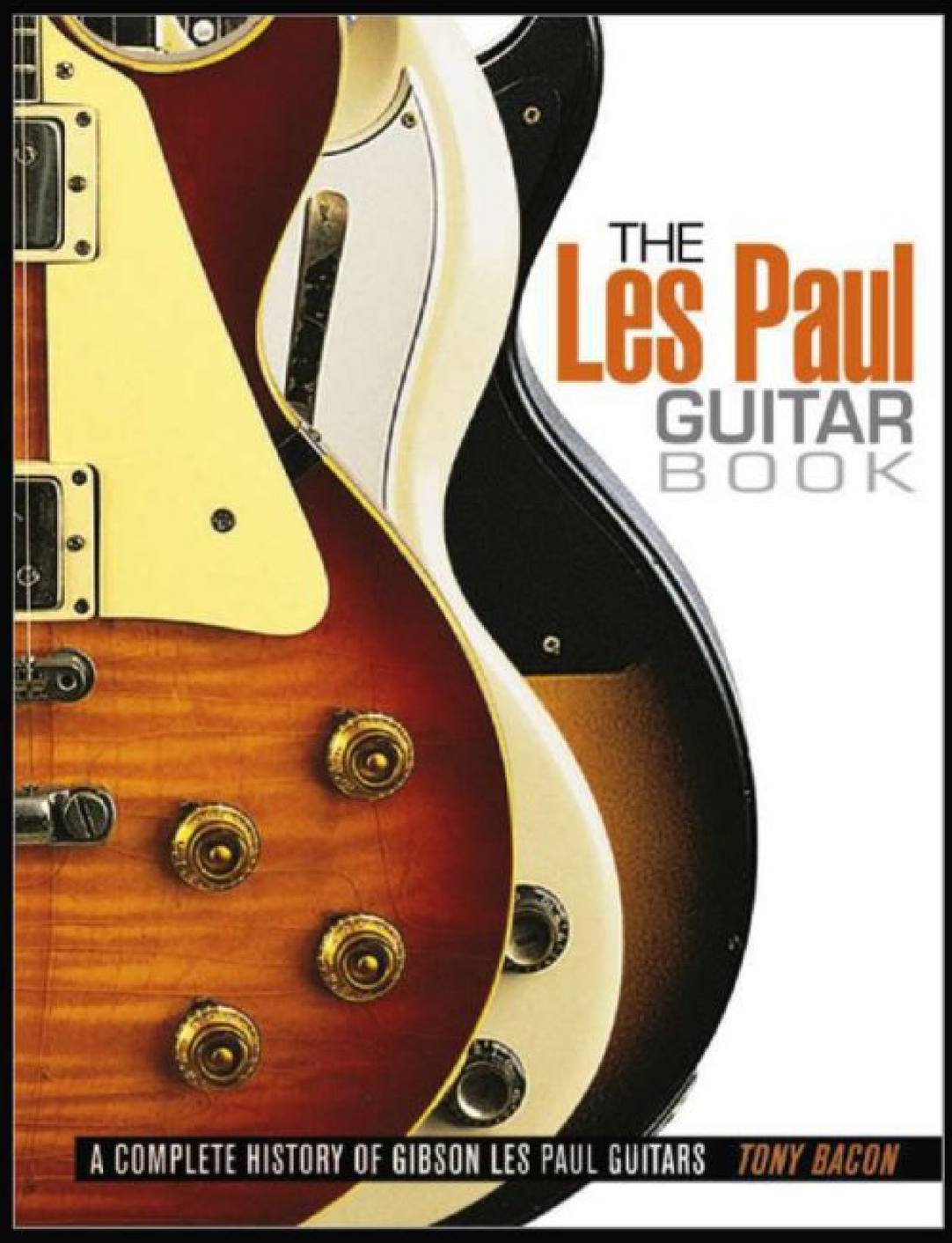

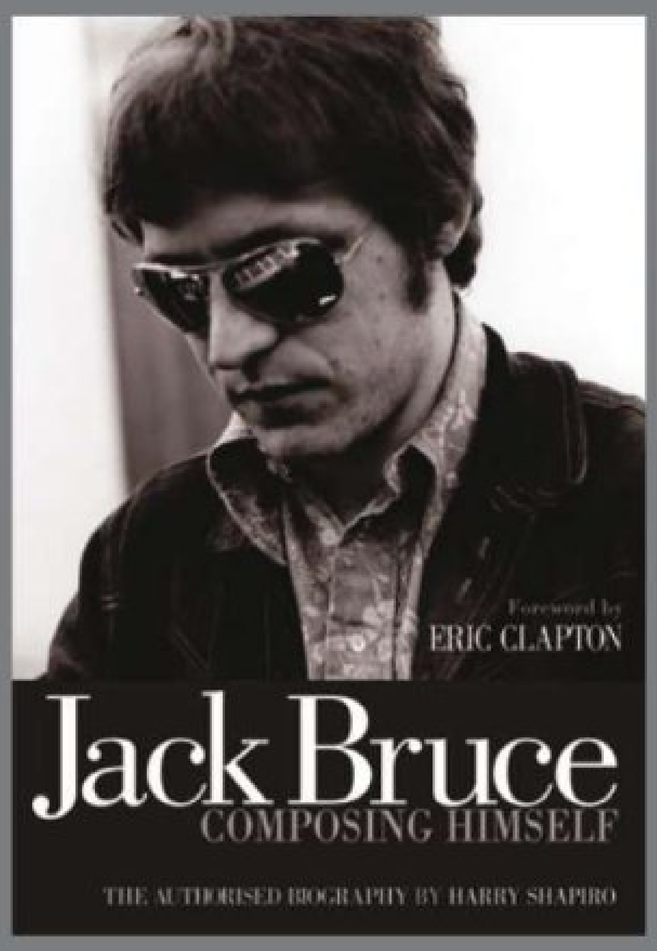

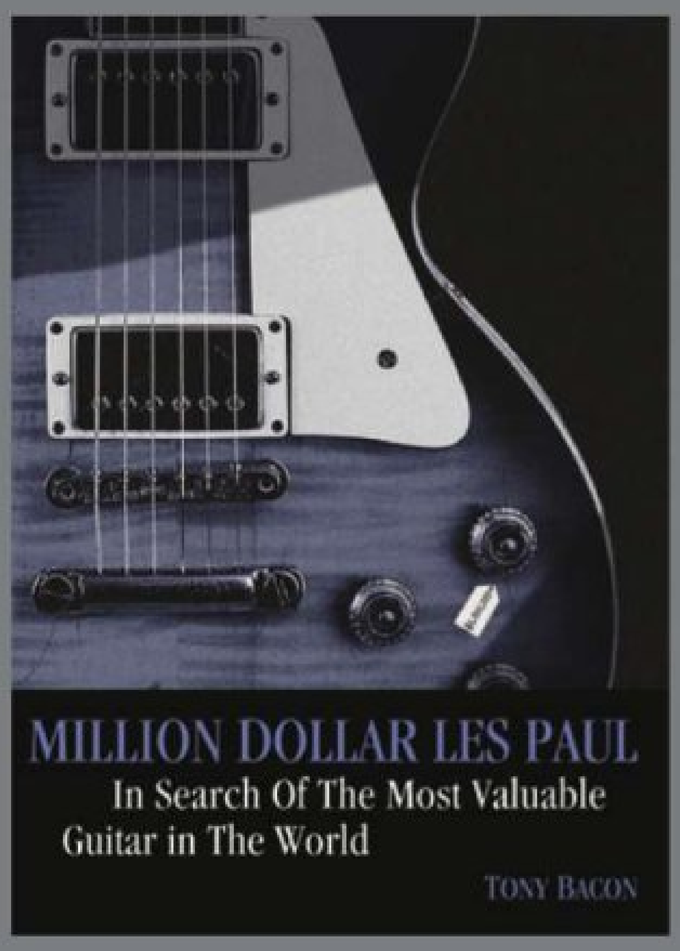

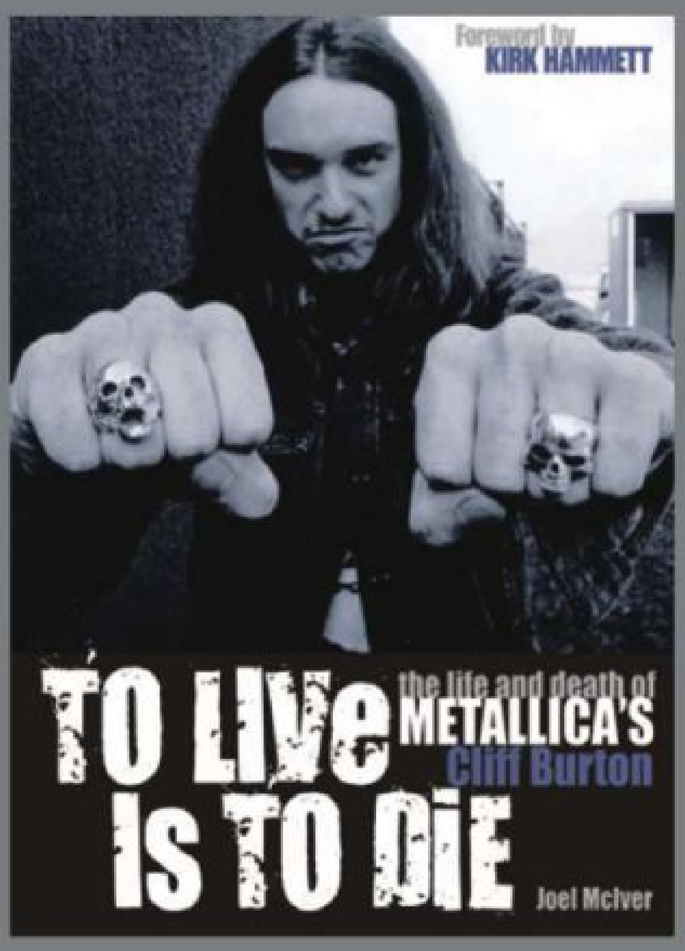

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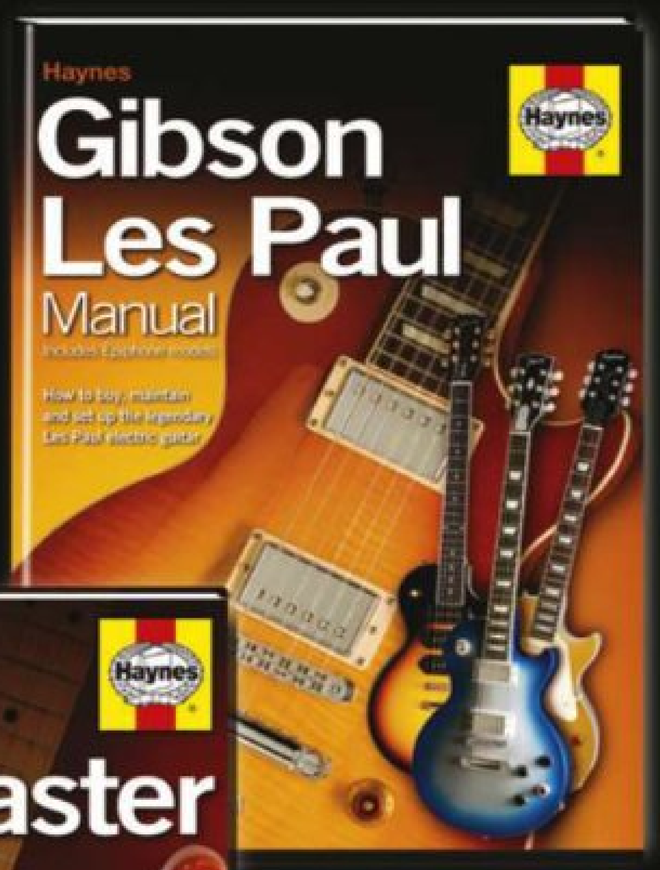

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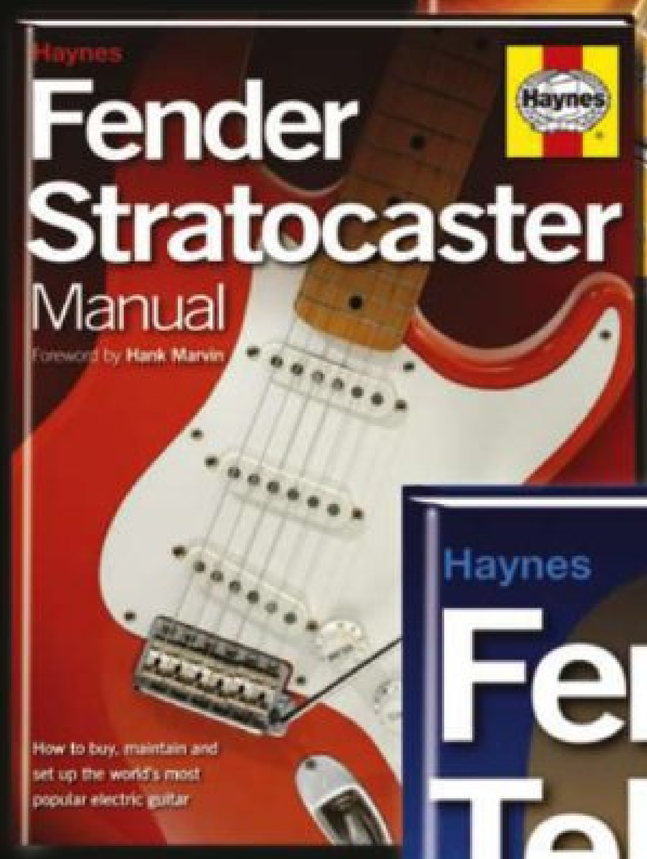

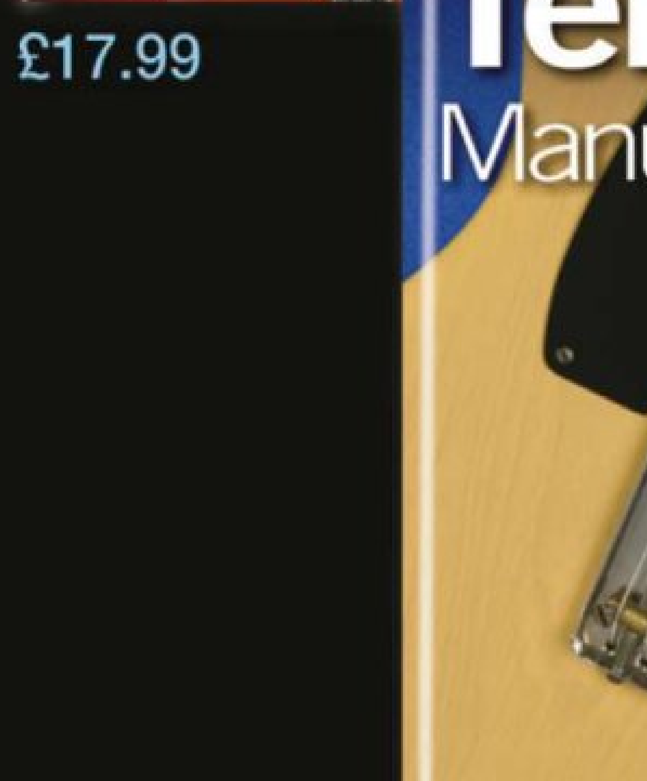

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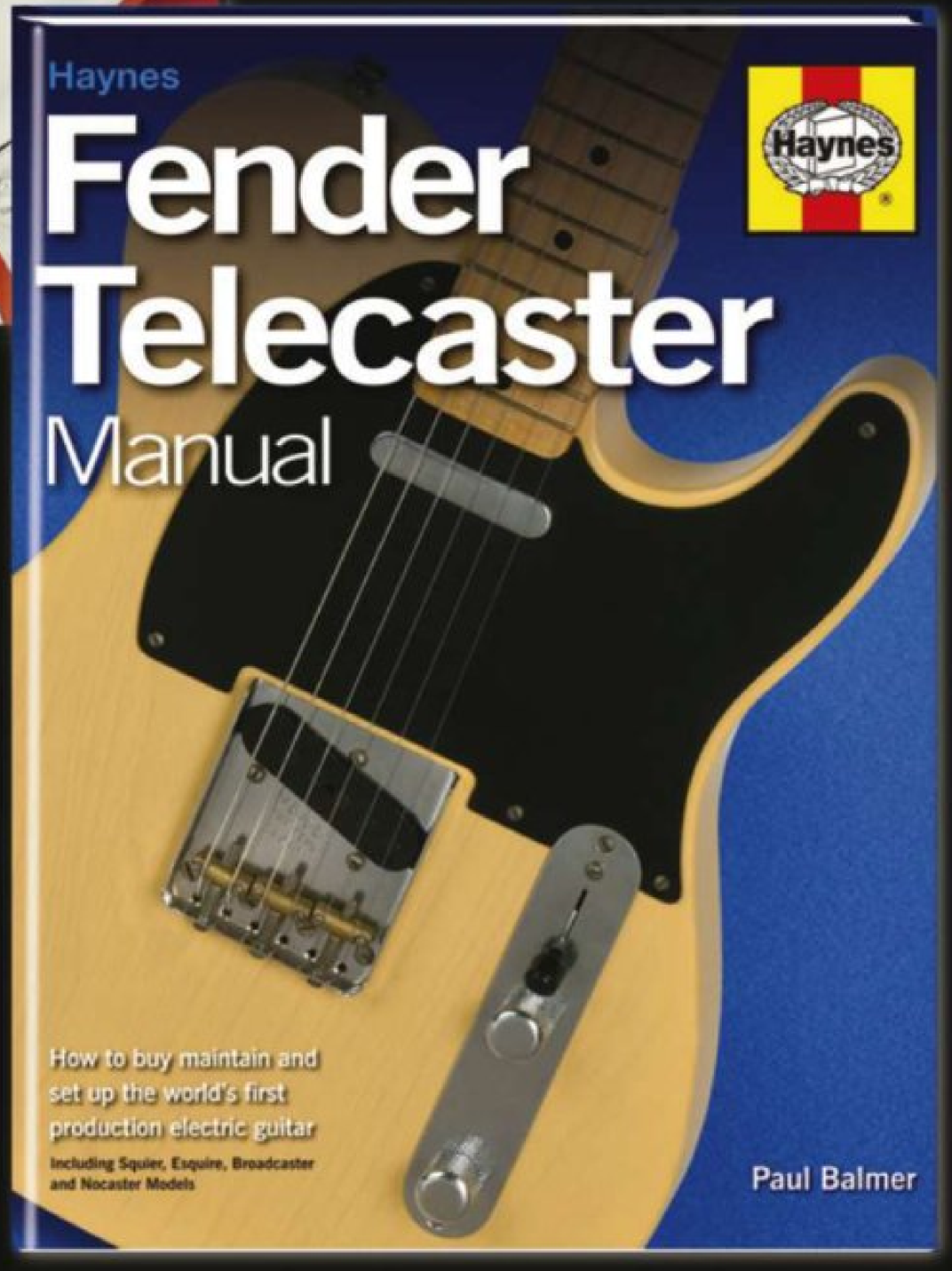

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Stuart Zender

The world-conquering Jamiroquai gig was the perfect platform for a scarily youthful Stuart Zender to showcase a bewildering array of snazzy funk and soul parts. Gareth Morgan dissects his style

Bass Techniques

Jamiroquai are by far the most successful band to come out of the London-based acid jazz movement of the early '90s. Since *Emergency On Planet Earth* appeared in 1993 they've released six further studio albums (including a hits collection) with worldwide sales now exceeding 35 million. The band has become increasingly dominated by singer/co-founder Jason 'Jay' Kay – these days, he's now viewed as pretty much a solo artist – but for the first three albums Jamiroquai was much more of a true band.

With any of these albums, aside from Kay's funkily idiosyncratic vocal and the didgeridoo of Wallis Buchanan, it's Stuart Zender's high-energy bass playing that really grabs you. Zender was born in Sheffield on 18 March 1974 but was brought up in Philadelphia; his family came back to the UK in the mid-'80s. He took up bass at the age of 16 and met Kay, who'd recently auditioned unsuccessfully for the Brand New Heavies, in 1993, almost immediately recording *Emergency*, the first of an eight-album deal with Sony BMG.

By the time the second offering, *The Return Of The Space Cowboy*, was released a year later, Zender was involved in the writing process and this continued in 1996 with *Travelling Without Moving*, an album that spawned the two hit singles (*Virtual Insanity* and *Cosmic Girl*), garnered numerous awards and went on to sell almost 12 million copies. After disagreements and misunderstandings, Zender quit in 1998 and has gone on to work with All Saints, Stevie Wonder and Mark Ronson.

Although he's played Music Man, Fender and Gibson basses, Zender is most closely associated with Warwick. Inspired by Jaco Pastorius, Stanley Clarke and funk luminaries like Donald Byrd and Roy Ayers, his Jamiroquai bass parts range from 16th-note laden tour de forces to kinetic slap work-outs and hook-heavy riffs, all delivered with impeccable feel and the confidence of a seasoned pro. The three albums highlight the maturation of a gifted musician who had only been playing for four years when he recorded the band's first album and was only 24 when he finally quit.

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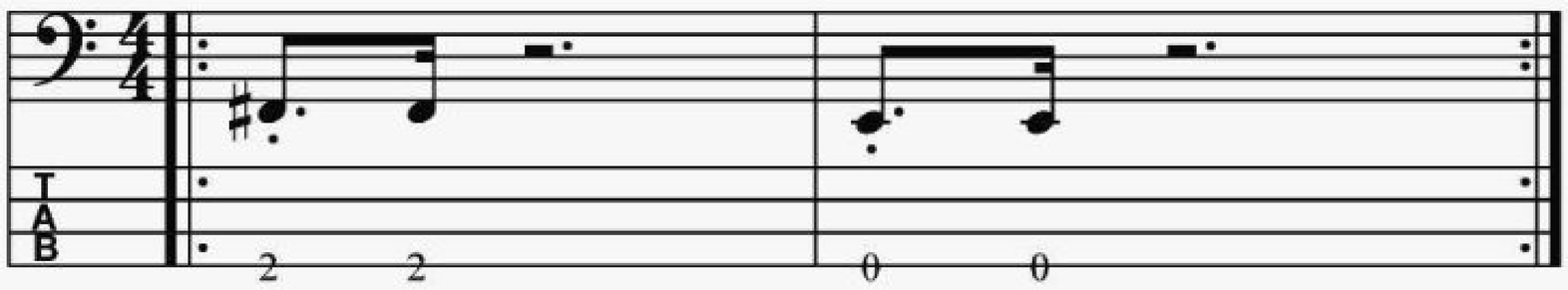
4/4 Time



Zender's Jamiroquai bass parts tend to be lively and dynamic. Studying them offers an excellent way to get into playing fingerstyle funk or, if you're more experienced, to sharpen up your chops – but they need to be practised really slowly at first, especially if you're new to the genre. In an effort to ease you in, our first example is based on an interlude section from *Revolution 1993* (from *Emergency On Planet Earth*). Here, Zender hits a classic funk rhythm and leaves plenty of space. Keep the note lengths short and punchy, and try your best to make the whole thing feel relaxed and effortless.

Ex 2: Come fly with me

4/4 Time

Zender's basslines have been described as 'the defining essence behind Jamiroquai's music,' and it's true that a huge percentage of the parts he delivered are the second most important melodic element behind Kay's vocal. Check out our second example: it's based on the groove from *Alright* (from *Travelling Without Moving*) and showcases Zender's approach to slap bass playing. The root/octave thumb/pull pattern gives it a disco feel and the 16ths and grace notes make it slightly tricky to enunciate cleanly. For non-slappers, it works just as well with fingers or pick.

Ex 3: From another galaxy

4/4 Time

Released in November 1996, the single *Cosmic Girl* (*Travelling Without Moving*) was a huge hit and a portent of the disco-oriented songs that would come from the post-Zender Jamiroquai. Also, as this was the third album, Zender's playing displays a much wider dynamic range, especially for someone with his meagre playing mileage. In the chorus he delivers a basically solid quarter note bassline featuring some disco octave-licks and other light embellishments, but we're concentrating on the verse part with its tight chromatic run in bar 1 and mixture of syncopated accents and space in bar 2.

Ex 4: Psychedelic picture frames

4/4 Time

While Stuart Zender cites commonly-acknowledged bass greats Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius as his major influences, the heavily syncopated edge you'll find in many of his bass parts can be more directly traced back to the more soul-oriented '70s funk from the likes of Earth Wind & Fire's bass god Verdine White. The chorus part from *Space Cowboy* (from *The Return Of The Space Cowboy*) is one of many splendid examples of this. Check out our version above; aside from accurate reproduction of the rhythm, the important thing is, again, a nice, relaxed feel.

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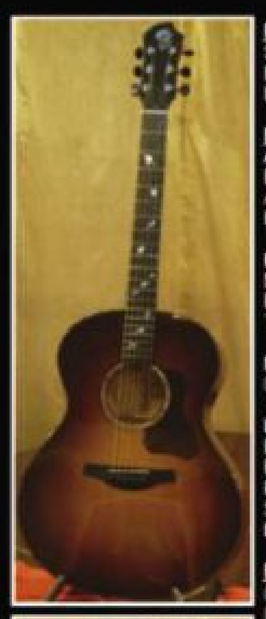

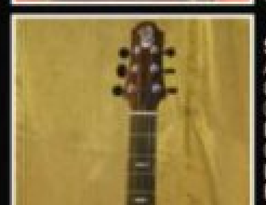

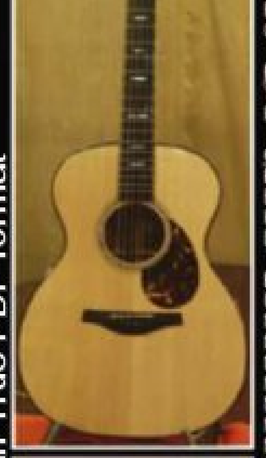

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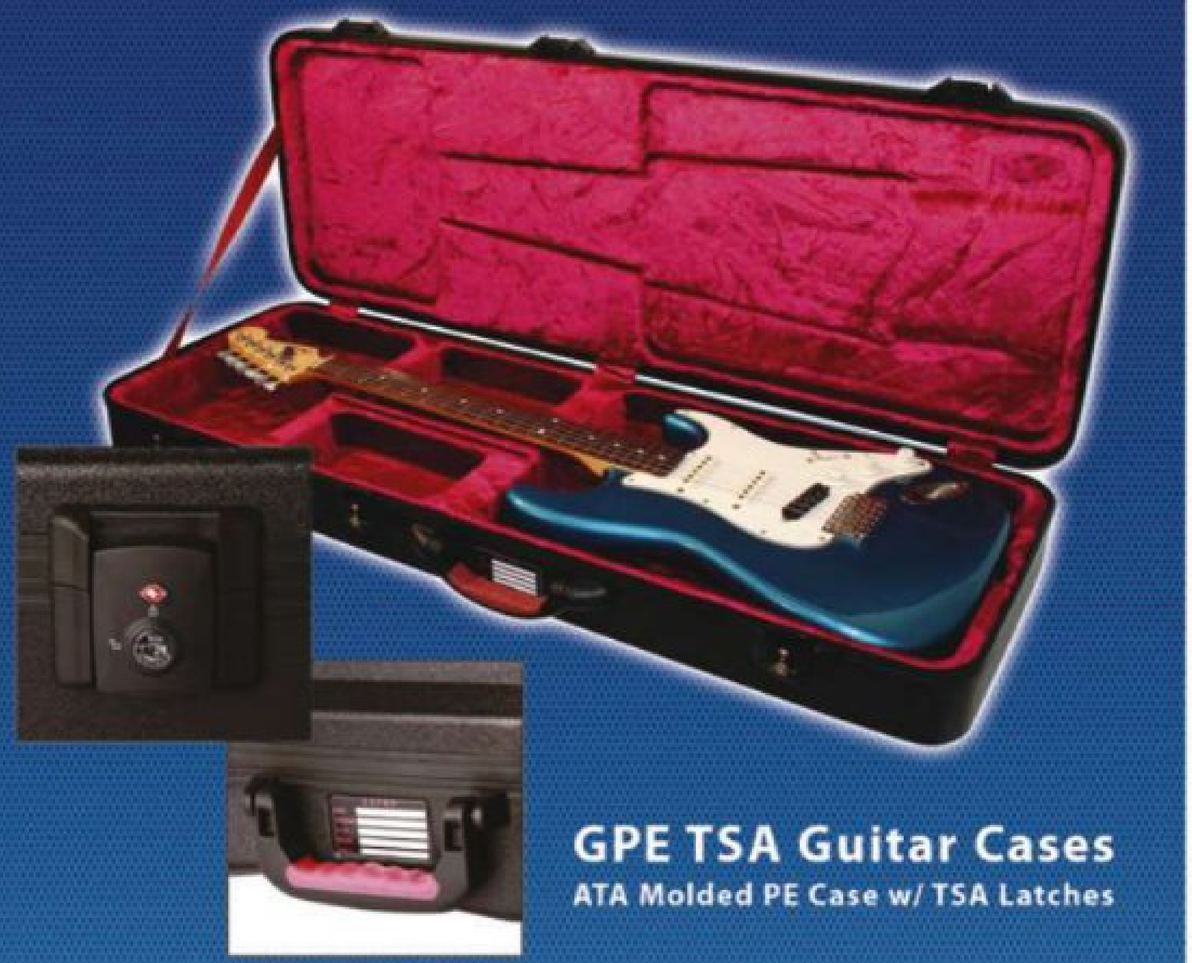

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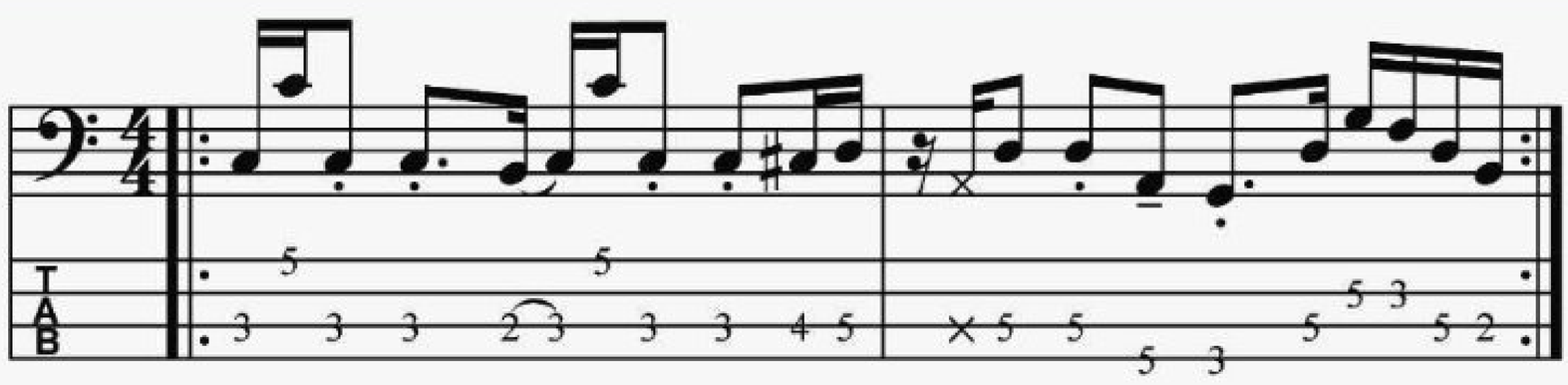
Ex 5: Draw like you're superfly

4/4 Time

Most melodically-driven bassists concentrate their excursions on the upper end of the neck, and Zender is no exception. All of them, even the ones that don't realise it, owe a debt in this instance to Paul McCartney. This example is based on the opening section from *Just Another Story* (from *The Return Of The Space Cowboy*) and, as you can see from the '8va' instruction and the tab, the lick in bar 1 is played right up there in the cutaway zone. Players of traditional Fender basses with only 20 frets won't be able to reach it, so simply play it down an octave instead... it's just as much fun.

Ex 6: Squeeze ya

4/4 Time



Zender regularly used effects with Jamiroquai. Alongside that reliable old favourite, distortion, he also favoured a squonky-sounding envelope filter or auto wah, effects which were made popular on bass by Funkadelic's Bootsy Collins. There's a good example of the gurgly sound that either of these effects create on the *Emergency On Planet Earth* album in the form of *Blow Your Mind* and we've tried to get you close to Zender's bassline with our version. Using the effect is fun, but the part itself works just as well without it, especially if you go for a nice fat bridge pickup sound.

Ex 7: Gone too high

4/4 Time

Too Young To Die (from *Emergency On Planet Earth*) was the first bassline Stuart Zender ever recorded for Jamiroquai, not long after his audition in early 1993. It's basically in two sections, with the verse part having a more relaxed, loping feel which is doubled by the guitar. Kay scats over all of the chorus sections, and Zender grabs the opportunity to shift up through a few fingerstyle gears. Have a look at our close tribute: Zender plays hard to get that biting tone out of his Warwick Streamer, but you might want to just roll on more treble as this one is pretty tricky.

Ex 8: We all live underground

4/4 Time

If our seventh example was awkward, our final offering this month ramps it up a few more notches on the difficulty scale. It's based on Zender's flat-out thumb work on *Virtual Insanity* from *Travelling Without Moving*. As you can see from the second bar, you need to be well-versed in slap technique to have a chance with this one – although, to be fair, our example cheats a bit by incorporating a version of one of the trickier fills from the fade-out, just to make your life complete. Needless to say, the way to go about tackling this one is carefully... and at a very slow tempo!

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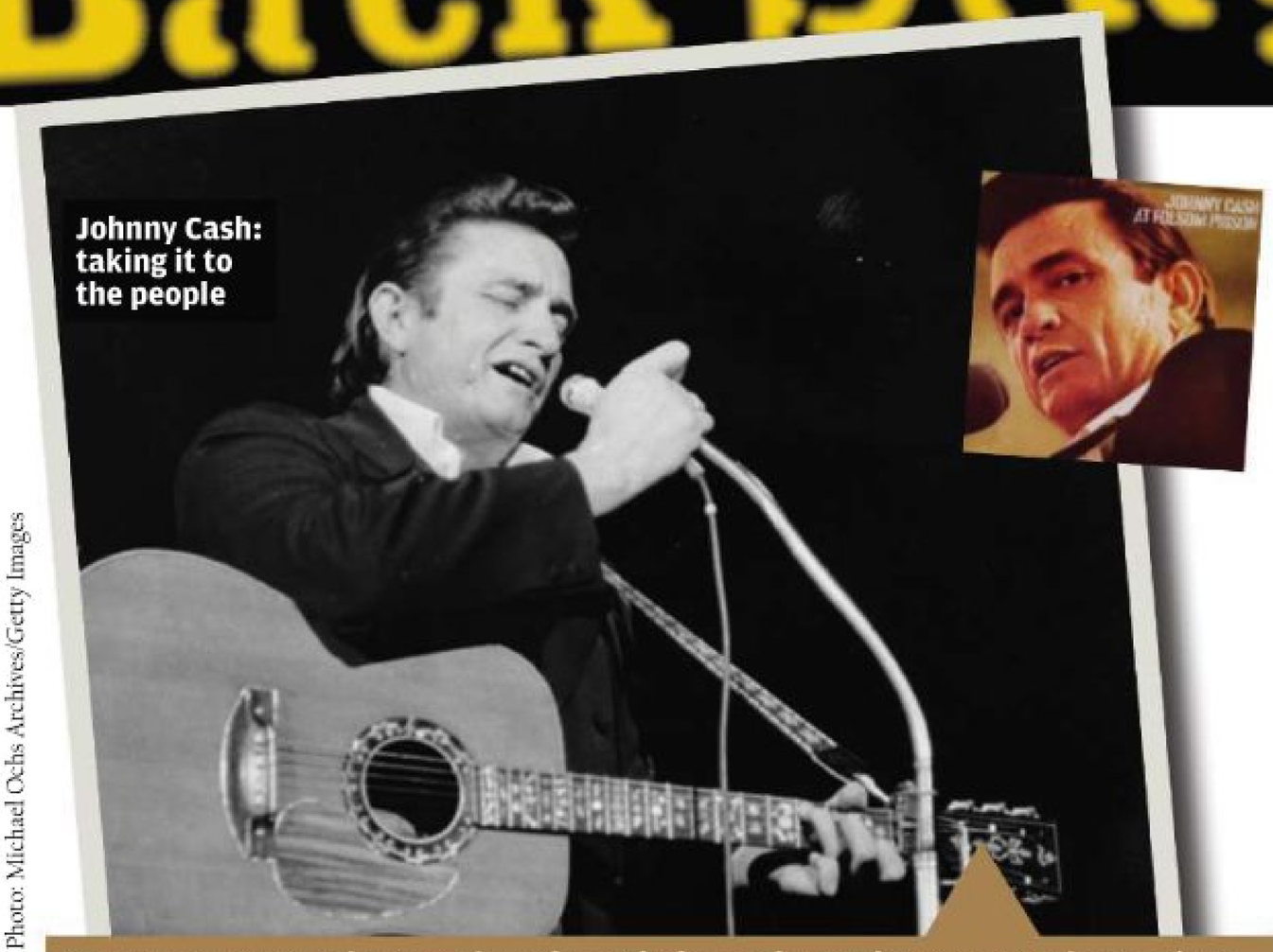
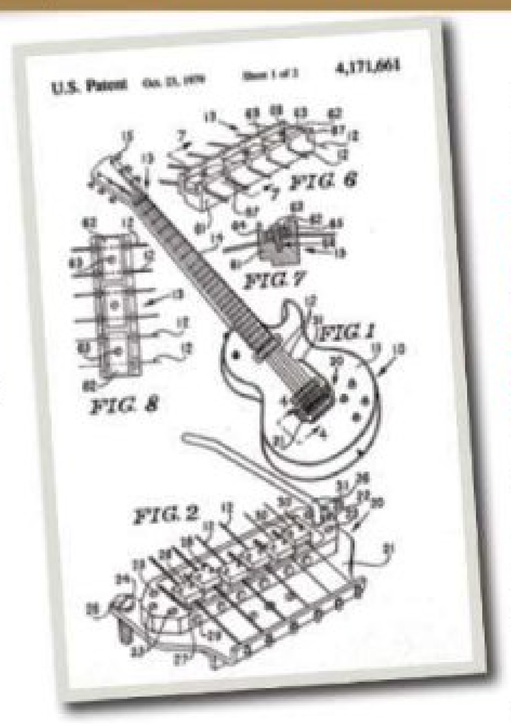


Photo: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Johnny Cash: taking it to the people

13 January 1968: Johnny Cash performs in front of 2000 inmates at Folsom Prison, California. Inspired by the film *Inside The Walls Of Folsom Prison*, the Man In Black recorded *Folsom Prison Blues* in 1955 and was soon flooded with letters from inmates requesting a show. Thanks to support from producer Bob Johnston, Columbia Records agreed, and Cash got his wish, hitting the stage with wife-to-be June Carter, Carl Perkins and the Tennessee Three. The set included *Greystone Chapel*, written about Folsom chapel by jailbird Glen Shirley; Cash heard the song for the first time the night before, and chose to learn it for his performance. The resulting live LP, *At Folsom Prison*, resurrected Cash's career after drug abuse nearly finished him – but only just: following Kennedy's assassination, lead single *Folsom Prison Blues* was blacklisted by radio (owing to the line 'I shot a man in Reno'). Despite Cash's objections, the offending lyric was changed and the single quickly became a hit. The album was certified gold later that year.



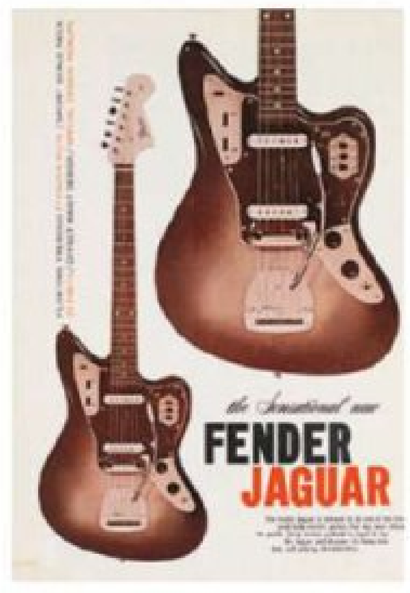
3 January 1977: Floyd D Rose files his first patent for his Tremolo System. As an amateur guitarist and also a machinist, Floyd Rose was well qualified to improve on the vibrato systems available at the time. Inspired by the attacking styles of rogue guitarists like Jimi Hendrix, Rose began work on prototypes that addressed the tuning issues plaguing other designs. He realised that by using a nut with three clamps and a special bridge, he could 'lock' the strings in place at both ends, solving the problem. Rose's brainwave allowed guitarists to be far more extreme with their whammy bars, radically dropping and raising the pitch. Kramer soon snapped up the distribution, and with Van Halen's endorsement it rocketed into the mainstream as a tool for guitarists the world over.

January 1959: Buddy Holly completes his last-ever recording alone in his New York apartment. Shortly after his tragic death in a plane crash in February, Holly's Ampex tape recorder was discovered at his home. It contained 13 rough takes mostly featuring Buddy with his acoustic, including *Peggy Sue Got Married* and *Crying, Waiting, Hoping*. The recording became known as *The Apartment Tapes*. Producers Norman Petty and Jack Hansen were given the tapes and added a full band, the Fireballs,

resulting in several posthumous hits.

31 January 1968: The Who finish their tour of New Zealand with a notorious gig in Wellington, Auckland, supported by the Small Faces. The night began in customary rock'n'roll manner with Keith Moon ejecting the contents of his hotel room out of the window. After the police failed to keep the band in check, the hotel called in the army. Things broke down further at the gig when Daltrey threatened the DJ, who then refused to announce the bands. Next, the Who took Steve Marriott's new Gibson and spray-painted it pink; Marriott refused to play the guitar and gave it to Townshend to smash on stage... which he did. The behaviour (and the performance) was so bad that a local paper reported, 'Ex-Fans of The Small Faces and The Who sighed 'Good Riddance' when the riotous rockers left New Zealand.'

January 1962: Fender get to work on the first pre-production Jaguars. Echoing the offset waist of the Jazzmaster and with a floating vibrato, the Jaguar was a new high-end Fender, perfect for showcasing their custom colours. This seductive medium-scale model had new features such as a spring-loaded string mute (an unpopular detail, eventually phased out) and suave chrome control panels. The pickups were upgraded with special shielding plates, and the Jazzmaster's rhythm circuit was upgraded with a trio of lead-circuit switches. The Jaguar also included several firsts for the company, such as the new 'chunky' logo on the headstock and 22 frets. Despite its adoption by the likes of Beach Boy Carl Wilson, sales declined and it was discontinued in 1975. The Jag underwent a surge in popularity when it was slung low by alt-rockers such as Kurt Cobain and Kevin Shields.



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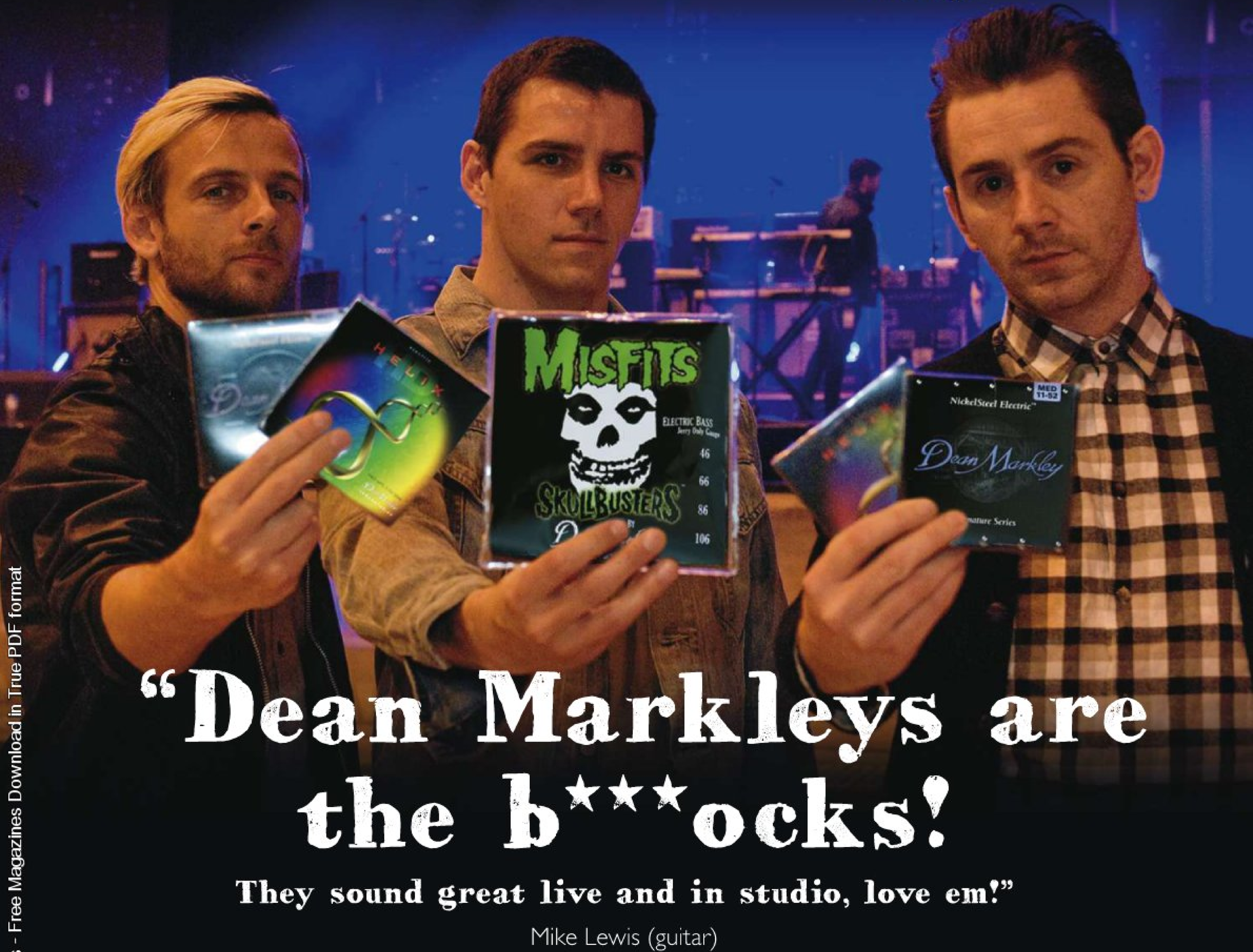

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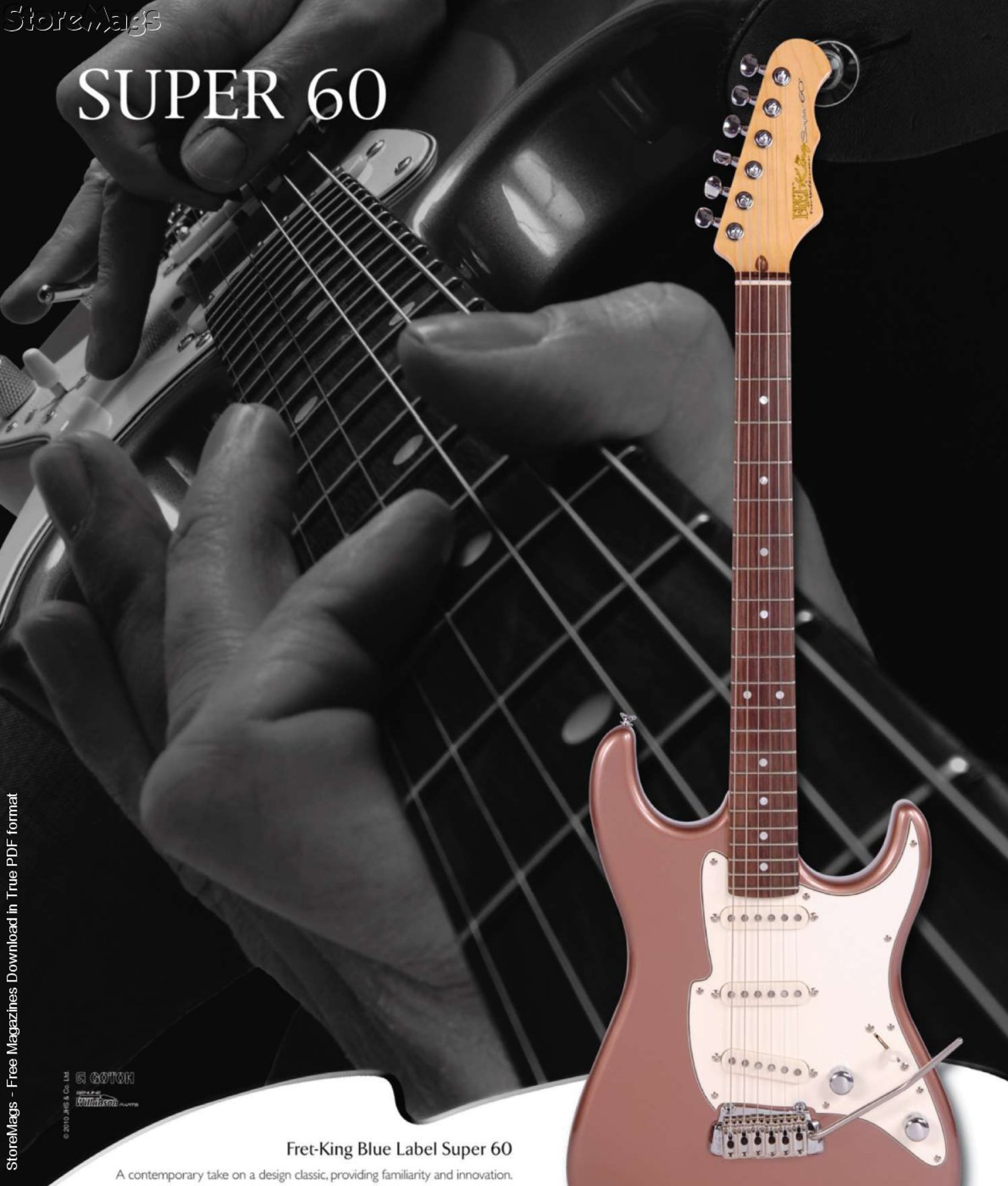
SUPER 60



Fret-King Blue Label Super 60

A contemporary take on a design classic, providing familiarity and innovation.

Visually unique with the Fret-King stepped pickguard, featuring a two-piece centre-jointed American alder body, Canadian hard rock maple neck and Indian rosewood fingerboard, the Blue Label Super 60 has all the foundations of greatness.

The Trev Wilkinson designed VS401V vibrato ensures a totally smooth, return-to-pitch operation. The VSV-style bent steel saddles offer superior tone and intonation, and the adjustable-tension push-in arm provides a neat ergonomic finishing touch. Calibrated, balanced Wilkinson pickups offer a perfect blend of tonality, articulation, depth and power.

Visit your Fret-King Dealer and play your next guitar today.

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MODEL ILLUSTRATED: FB60BMI, BURGUNDY MIST. BODY: ALDER, NECK: MAPLE BOLT-ON, SCALE 25.5"/648MM, TUNERS: GOTOH MAGNUM LOCKING, BRIDGE: WILKINSON VS40IV VIBRATO, PICKUPS: 3 X WILKINSON WHS SINGLE COILS, CALIBRATED. CONTROLS: VOLUME, TONE, 5-WAY SELECTOR
COLOUR OPTIONS: BURGUNDY MIST, ICE WHITE AND ORIGINAL VINTAGE BURST. £779.00 RRP INC. VAT.

FRET-King by Trev Wilkinson .com

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